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## Aldebaran Vol. 19, Issue 2

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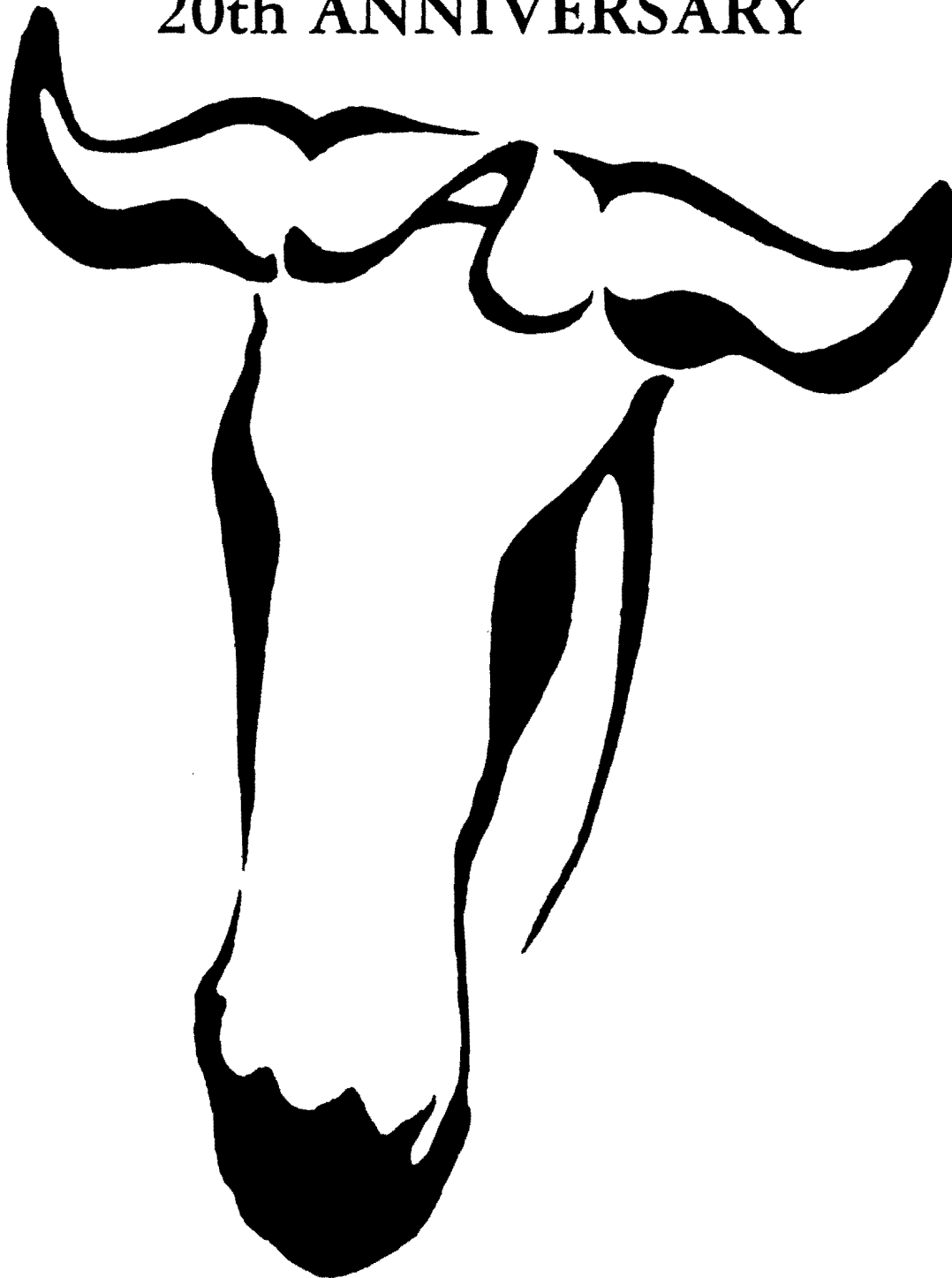
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Journal of Management Inquiry Vol. 9, Issue 2

# ALDEBARAN

## 20th ANNIVERSARY



**Welcome to the Fall 1991 issue of Aldebaran literary magazine!**

**Aldebaran** is a student-run literary magazine. The magazine was created in 1971 and has been publishing issues semi-annually and annually for the past twenty years.

**Aldebaran** publishes both fiction and poetry, in traditional, contemporary, and experimental forms; we are receptive to nearly all styles and topics. In the future, we would like to see more diversity in our magazine, and would like to encourage writers of all genres, from fantasy to dark fiction, science fiction, comedy, horror, drama, as well as classical and contemporary fiction and poetry, to submit their work.

Our guidelines are as follows, and should be strictly adhered to:

1. No submissions will be accepted without an accompanying stamped and self-addressed return envelope. Any submission that arrives without a s.a.s.e. will be discarded upon arrival.
2. All submissions should addressed to:  
**Aldebaran** Literary Magazine  
Roger Williams College  
1 Old Ferry Road  
Bristol, RI  
02809
3. Poetry should be limited to 5 poems per submission.
4. Short fiction should be no longer than 3,500 words (there is a 100 word leeway on this, any longer and the manuscript will not be considered). We do not publish novels or chapbooks.

5. No simultaneous submissions will be considered.

6. All submissions should be typed. Computer print-outs are acceptable if legible. Please do not send hand-written submissions.
7. Each page of a submission should include the title of the submission (story or poem), the author's name, address, and telephone number.
8. Please include a brief cover letter which contains a 2 to 3 sentence biographical sketch which may be included should the submission be accepted.
9. No submissions are read between April 1 and September 1, and November 1 and February 1. Any work received during this time will be returned unread.
10. Response time is 6 to 12 weeks. Comments are seldom included.
11. Contributors are encouraged to purchase a copy of the magazine before submitting material. Past issues are available for \$3. a piece, and issues published as of Fall 1991 may be purchased for \$5. a piece. Contributors are encouraged to request more recent issues since we have changed our image recently. Postage is included in these prices.

The magazine is digest-sized, approximately 50 to 100 pages, side-stapled or perfect-bound. Art work is accepted for, and used on the covers. The price per issue is \$5. per copy.

Payment for acceptances are two free copies of the issue in which the work appears. We do not buy work. All copy rights revert to the author upon publication of the work.

## **Aldebaran 2**

**A Spring 1992 issue will not be published. Please do not send submissions before September 1, 1992. All work received during this time will be returned unread.**

The issue which you have purchased is our twentieth anniversary issue. We hope that you enjoy it!

Sincerely,

**The Staff of Aldebaran**

**Aldebaran's 1991 Staff**

**Managing Editor:** Debra L. Malewicki

**Assistant Editors:** Nancy Gabriel

Ian Gilligan

**Staff Members:** Quantella Owens

Jim Pauly

Melissa Peo

Mark Poriss

Jay Tucci

Cynthia Zenofsky

**Cover Artwork:** Jeffrey S. Loura

**Aldebaran 4**

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**the falcon**

just before dark  
we heard a falcon cry  
watched his wings  
fold for the dive

my heart leapt  
at the sight

we walked on a ways  
side by side  
and as we walked  
a mighty feeling  
overpowered me  
told me  
the time was right

i said to her  
I LOVE YOU SWEETHEART  
and she answered  
I LIKE YOU TOO

: did you know  
one wrong move of a wing  
and the bird instantly dies?

*bernell macdonald*

## **trespass**

there is a sudden rap on my door  
a friend perhaps  
and i am too late to turn the lock

for my nerves are bad  
and i am overtired  
and dont want to talk to anyone

so like a criminal in my own home  
i take refuge in the bathroom  
hide behind the half-closed door

my friend knocks louder  
opens the front door  
yells my name into my house

i am shaking all over  
terrified he'll come in  
and for some reason check the bathroom

and there he'll find me--cringing  
caught in the act of committing a crime  
far more heinous  
than his trespass could ever be

*bernell macdonald*

## **Aging Gracefully**

The liver spots on my hands  
know about me  
the spread in my hips  
gives me away

**Aldebaran 8**

the lines by my eyes  
telling tales  
that the candles on my cake  
won't deny  
the pep in my step  
is slowing down  
and the color in my hair  
washes out  
the teeth in my grin  
are leaving  
and the corns on my feet  
knock me out

but the mens  
still step aside  
in awe,  
when they see me coming

*Dawn A. Hightower*

### **Signals from Ruins**

Signals from ruins bleed me of light,  
telling me the time has come  
to abandon lost causes  
and to swallow wine in love.

My wives are statues that flaunt their forms  
in insentient array. They are found  
in graveyards which I frequent  
only when the skies are raining.

My songs lose their meaning there,  
so I sigh and rewrite them blindly.  
If I make no effort to offer at all,  
I succumb to stupor, the statues' asset.

It is long love these angels like,  
for me to loose my longing amid their lanes,  
to toss my poems into the rain,  
to abandon the body and fall among them.

I lost a career because I found my grave.  
I loitered with limp limbs amid flowers  
until the angels flew with a noose about me.  
Croaking, I wrote in the air, in the dark, in the rain.

*Dick Huguley*

### **My Cerebral Love**

With ineffectual desire  
Walk naked for me  
Through harmonious textures of light and dark,  
Bathed in streaming patterns of color  
Borne on fleeting shadows of soil.

Gleam like the lily there,  
My cerebral love,  
You who never cut your raven hair.  
The tresses cease naturally at the curve,  
The sleek sculpted arch of your back,  
Tangling, shadowy, over the bright skin,  
So the living contrast glimmers.

### **Aldebaran 10**

I wait for you,  
You who never fully arrive.  
Not so far away you lie,  
Awash in currents, glistening,  
Distant enough to be imagined,  
Yet emancipated from reflections  
Whose unceasing glow you stoke with my illusions  
Till I siphon madness from your face.

*Dick Huguley*

### **Rendezvous**

When you walked away  
you left no impression  
on the shadows of birds,  
themselves in flight.

Due for a rebuttal,  
I clapped my hands  
toward a diamond-cornered space,  
directing echoes from the brick expanse  
toward your diminishing form.

One answer was your glancing back  
where I stood between love  
and the law of averages.  
Another, more primordial,  
was the cries of the alarmed birds.  
The flock broke, scattered,  
but then regrouped.

Every year I return  
to the diamond-cornered space.  
The migratory birds fly over,  
and in their shadows I seek yours.

*Dick Huguley*

### **An AIDS Victim**

Angular face,  
Deepening eye sockets,  
Skin-on-bones body--

A teetering scarecrow

Dragooned by an invisible tyrant,  
Cocooned by desperation,  
    Living the moment  
        Like a condemned prisoner  
                Facing a firing squad.

*Mahdy Y. Khaiyat*

### **Looming Visions**

Wrestling with looming visions  
of plastic tubes and needles  
weaving webs of life  
and the sharp scent of alcohol  
sprinkled over the sour must of death;  
I ventured into the funeral parlor,  
gaudy halfway house  
echoing some maudlin tradition.  
I spotted you over the crowd,  
all attending for you; prone profile

**Aldebaran 12**

steeped in peace; hair  
familiarily combed, designer glasses  
sitting as always.  
I ignored the nose  
hanging too far left  
and the swollen jaw;  
both bitter reminders  
of vain rescue attempts,  
and for a few hours  
gazed at your from afar;  
finding peace in your presence.

*Charles Bigelow*

### **Forget About Love: A Duet For Woman and Man**

He always does it when I'm thinking  
I'm going to be short the rent  
late with the car payment  
I'll have to skip the dentist this month.  
There isn't anything left.  
He always does it when it's 2AM  
we've been arguing all night  
about stupid things  
I don't even know.  
It was something about being late  
and not calling.  
Now he thinks it's time to screw and make up  
He goes right for the crotch  
no warm ups.  
His hand goes down the front of my sweats  
pries my lips apart  
he sticks his finger in  
his middle finger

his pussy finger I heard him tell his friends.  
Yeah, he sticks his finger in  
and swirls it around  
like he's mixing paint  
or a cocktail and forget the swizzle stick.  
I try to push him off.  
I try to tell him I'm not ready  
I'm not in the mood  
I don't want to.  
And even if I did  
I need to be kissed  
I need to be held first  
I need to be warmed up slowly.  
He doesn't hear.  
He pulls my pants down  
like there's a meter running.  
He doesn't even take them off.  
He unzips himself  
and pushes inside me.  
It hurts  
and I wince  
sometimes I yelp  
but he just thinks  
that the sound means I like what he's doing.

\* \* \*

In bed I white fuck her hard  
trying to blot out any colors  
but me  
and my penis  
and the heat  
and the wet  
and the shrill cry of the box spring squeaking.  
And we go sheet at it  
with a violence that I mistake for passion  
hurling the covers to the floor  
turning the mattress off its frame.

**Aldebaran 14**



\* \* \*

I want a man to love me.  
He'll bring me flowers.  
Maybe he'll read poems.  
No, forget the poems.  
I'd settle for intelligent conversation  
about something other than sports.  
Who cares about the Lakers?  
Who cares if the Dodgers lose another one this year?  
I want my opinion to matter.  
I want to be heard.  
I want to be stroked.  
I want light kisses  
back rubs  
foot massage.  
I want to take bubble baths.  
I want to laugh.

There must be a reason  
why I don't get any of that.  
It's because I'm not pretty.  
My breasts are too small  
my hips are too wide.  
I'm hairy.  
My thighs rub.  
I climb a thousand stairs  
and my thighs rub.  
I think my eyes aren't big enough.  
I don't like my teeth  
I don't smile much.  
I don't like my arms.  
They're crooked  
and the backs are starting to sag.  
My mother told me, Study,  
you'll do better with brains.

I didn't go to my prom.

\* \* \*

But maybe we don't go at it at all.  
Maybe I go at it alone,  
because she has asked before  
in quiet tones  
holding my face  
stroking my hair,  
can't I just hold her?  
And she will ask it again, after,  
with her back turned,  
jammed against the headboard  
staking out her small part of the bed,  
Can't I just hold her  
and let my love flow into her?

\* \* \*

I get pounded  
screwed hard  
screwed raw  
screwed sore  
screwed and screwed and screwed  
battered into the floor.  
Most times we don't even get to the bed.  
And I never come  
unless I rub myself.  
If he catches me  
he slaps my hand away.  
That's dirty, he tells me.

But I don't leave him.  
No I don't leave him  
because I can change him,  
only I'm the only one who can change him.  
I deserve this.  
I'm strong, I can make it work.

**Aldebaran 16**

When his life gets better  
we'll get better.  
He needs more time.  
He might be my last chance.  
He needs me.  
Sometimes, he wants me.  
I can change him.  
I can help him.  
I can change him.

\* \* \*

I don't know how to do that.  
I'm lying.  
I don't want to do that  
because that would mean that I felt something  
other than this spark sweep  
that tugs at my cock and balls  
that takes over my mind  
that lets me push away any other thoughts  
and other feelings besides  
I want to fuck her.  
I want to pound her  
I want to control her  
and make her scream  
and hold her underneath me, writhing.  
I want to go faster and faster  
deeper inside  
until the friction gets her,  
even though she may feel  
like tenderized meat  
the friction gets her,  
that liquid heat  
because her cunt is sensitive  
at last,  
some move,  
some twist hits the right spot,

and she can't help herself  
meeting my thrusts,  
pushing back,  
the sweat sprays,  
hairs mingle,  
hips ham against hips,  
bone meets bone  
and we come, sometimes together,  
we come.  
And then one of us cries.

But it's never me.

\* \* \*

You see, he always does it when I don't want to.  
And when it's over he says,  
You know I love you,  
I just can't stay  
as if the beard burn  
the sore nipples  
my raw sex scraped now and bruised  
the greasy drip of his come  
between my legs  
is proof enough  
the yearh, he loves me,  
he screwed me didn't he?  
Didn't he?

*Ian Randall Wilson*

## **I Tell**

She's compiling a list  
of all the things  
she can't do or say anymore

## **Aldebaran 18**

because she's afraid  
I'll tell.  
She's afraid  
they're going to wind up  
in some poem  
or short story of mine  
although the names will be changed  
to protect the innocent.

You're ruining things, she's told me  
more than once.  
She says I'll force her  
to date someone in insurance  
or a CPA,  
someone with a head for numbers  
but not stories,  
someone she can trust with her feelings  
and her fantasies,  
someone who isn't always writing and watching,  
but never part of things.  
And she's tired of handing me pens at parties,  
giving up check stubs  
to be home to my scribbles.  
She says I'm costing her money  
in check printing charges.  
I think it's a small sacrifice for art.  
I think this  
hunching over my writing table  
scribbling away,  
setting down the events of last night,  
reconstructing the truth  
recasting our life on paper  
for anyone to see.  
I'm afraid she's right.  
I kiss and I tell.

I got her pants off on the first date  
and I tell.  
She is wet and moaning,  
we roll all over the rug and I tell.  
A week later we make love on the beach  
five times and I tell.  
I tell everyone that I love her  
when she doesn't want anyone to know.  
I stand up at readings and I tell  
that we're better in bed than we are anywhere else  
that she can't make a committment  
that she makes me afraid  
that she makes me feel happy  
that she confuses me  
that she hurts me  
I tell  
that I can only express my love  
by pressing her down  
by touching her hard  
by piercing her body  
night after nights,  
I tell.  
Because I'm another poet asshole  
a jerk  
an idiot.  
I can't be trusted.  
With me nothing is confidential.  
Fear of flying?  
I'll tell.  
Drinking problem?  
I'll tell.  
Can't cum?  
I'll tell.  
Give me your shame  
your burning feelings

**Aldebaran 20**

your rage  
your pain  
your masturbation fantasies  
I will tell it all.

Because I have to.  
Because I'm a poet  
and poets never lie.

Now her list is growing daily  
and when she gets to the end of the page,  
she'll have to reconsider  
whether to go on listing  
or just give up on me.

Did I mention  
I'm here  
alone?

*Ian Randall Wilson*

### **Insanity**

The psyche  
Bruised  
Beaten  
Bloody  
Jerks  
In dreadful  
Quivers,  
A corpse-thing  
On a string.

*Genevieve Stephens*

## **Fall**

I see you but it's not enough  
I smell you but it's not enough  
I hear you, your breath, your heart  
but still, not enough  
I need to touch you  
My hands ache to smooth over your flesh  
My arms strain to hold your form close  
to me, molding my body to yours, filling  
up the emptiness inside you  
but I know better, the emptiness is mine  
maybe.  
To touch you could prove addictive, the pain,  
it could cause would be so sharp, but it  
wouldn't be enough, not enough for me,  
but enough for you  
maybe.  
The need, so strong in me  
to touch, to desire  
you are so close, to me, to my touch; my mind  
my desire  
Your voice, it coaxes my muscles to submit  
my will weakens with your every move  
and if it were not for your eyes I would  
easily fall to you  
but your eyes tell a different story and they  
drill into me with diamond-cut accuracy  
I know the feelings I read in you are not  
the mirror images of my own and are not  
your wanton possessions  
just as you will never fall to me  
maybe.

*Mark Gafur*

**Aldebaran 22**



## Anger

*For Patrice Bittner-Humphreys*

Your hands  
have gargoyled,  
twisted into shapes  
by pain,  
sentinels  
high above your Notre Dame,  
but not ugly,  
only signs  
to ward off  
what is within,  
the hidden sacred self  
that needs protection:  
the Real Presence.  
You say it's anger,  
it needs a name,  
we name our fears,  
and even try to corral  
God with a name  
unlike ours,  
but it doesn't work.  
So here too, in you,  
we can't name  
the unknown,  
so you continue  
to explore this hidden region,  
never stopping,  
but it all takes a toll on you.  
Yet your body only shows  
the purgation you've put  
your soul through  
so we can see your beauty  
mirrored in your soul-eyes.

*By Benedict Auer, O.S.B.*

## **Wine Country - Napa, California**

"But for this we have to experience TIME in a new way."

Thomas Merton

The vines  
stand in rows  
upon rows,  
hands upstretched,  
tiptoed to gather in  
the warmest rays  
emanating from the sun.  
Last summer  
in Israel  
I saw the very same thing  
grapes heavy on  
the upward vine,  
it wasn't as commercial,  
but just as bucolic,  
Palestinian peasants  
would gather in the crop,  
here machines  
will do the work  
when it's time,  
but it has to be  
the right TIME.  
I'm again too early  
as I was last year,  
one day I will be  
in perfect time  
with TIME,  
then I'll see  
the harvest  
as it occurs.

*Fr. Benedict Auer, O.S.B.*

## **Porches**

We built them, but we live here  
in Pheasant Glen  
and clackety-clack or beep-beep  
past them  
fifty blurred weeks a year,  
them  
the back porches, most, of wood,  
stacked one on one on one,  
with clotheslines, and shirts, sheets,  
something borrowed, something blue,  
and Baby, Baby, I love you  
on them.

We built them, but we live here  
in Pheasant Glen.

*Walter Kuchinsky*

## **Vernal Equinox**

A woman stands in her doorway saying  
that her days are numbered.  
She waves her hand as if testing the air  
for a season of traitors;  
her arm goes high once, then down,  
then back and forth across the bleak horizon.  
Our eyes follow, and we await  
her few words,  
the scant mumblings of some requiem,  
her refusal to make peace with the worst  
of winter.

She claims she is a blood relative  
of warm weather,  
and because her smile bites a hole in the mid-  
morning light,  
we wonder if maybe she is even  
a little more mad than we  
as we grumble the snow from our driveways  
and curse the ice that has a twisted, murky  
grin.

At the high point of Spring, a gold ball  
arrives at the woman's door,  
brighter than a dozen ordinary suns;  
the door never opens, and we never see her again,  
except in the brilliant thing  
which bounces its welcome rays across  
the length of our bodies  
as we stretch ourselves to fill half the expanse  
of the signs she made,  
which mark the space of time that winter takes  
to clothe its disgrace and cover  
its dying face again.

*Mary Rudbeck Stanko*

## **20TH Century**

You gave it away  
that is,  
my life  
sold out the exile  
passed in  
the underground  
folded up

**Aldebaran 26**

in bureaucracy  
cursed down the  
camps  
waved on  
death's perpetual motion  
until you met  
over a cup  
of espresso  
and now know  
no way out.

*B.Z. Niditch*

### **A Train Ride**

At dusk  
in the dank train  
a murderer's sentence  
has not been commuted,  
sister stays at home  
playing the cadenzas  
she madly rehearsed  
on the surviving Strad.  
I want to hear  
her Papa Haydn's transcriptions  
rather than the rambling  
of pale shoulders  
taken away.

Through inky windows  
they are carrying out  
a foreign body  
looking like a musical joke  
standing up  
to my own voice.

Wonder is always in mourning  
for its album's leaf,  
here under staggered smoke  
full of apparitions' hours  
watching out  
of ritual Venetian blinds  
for nightfall  
covering our provincial shapes  
with a veil of farewell,  
when everyone's up to  
an art of execution.

*B. Z. Niditch*

### **On Being a Survivor**

I've searched for the high road  
in a lot of different places.  
Came to see that it wasn't a road  
after all.  
Just a trail  
marked by survivor's struggles.

In my travels  
I find  
Love to grow on  
support to lean on.  
When the trail narrows  
I am not alone.

No one needs the sorrow,  
no one needs the pain.  
In my struggles to survive  
I have spread my wings  
and learned  
to fly.

*Kelly A. Babson*

### **Birth-Death Moments**

My treasured lilac siamese  
had to be  
put down the first night  
of the war

I'd worked so hard  
to prevent:  
we bred him  
too dependent on us

that night I had a dream  
parents fear / a nightmare  
in which both my children  
went through the process

of death. . .  
I woke in a deep sadness  
and we ran  
to call New York City

to wish our son HAPPY BIRTHDAY  
feeling distant  
as the parents  
on their son's tv in 2001.

*Joan Payne Kincaid*

## **Going Home**

Miles upon miles,  
thoughts to reflect,

familiar smells usher through  
my recall as the bus rumbles  
and groans through towns  
and miles,

laughter, which has all but been  
forgotten to me filters into my  
memory,

it has been too long,  
too long since I have heard the  
deep sounding voice of my father,  
or the shrill crisp laugh of my  
mother,

I miss the smells that come from  
frying pans and boiling pans,  
the tinkling of glasses as they are  
being placed on the rack to dry,

leaning my nose against the window,  
I watch the world go by in a blur,

every mile that passes sinks me deeper  
into the crevices of my childhood,

the bus rumbles on and I savour my  
childhood that had all but been  
forgotten.

*Ross Morrison*



### **The Gift**

Lately I hear  
her voice evading  
color  
like her long unblinking stare  
that has sailed  
like Columbus  
for a new world.

*Michael K. White*

### **Aftershocks**

Their music has made  
the street sweat on the  
first day of spring.  
Their soiled smoke coils  
forget to rise  
and the sun forgets to fall  
and the sky has tripped  
and the needle stars have  
punctured their balloons  
while running past laughing.

*Michael K. White*

### **Mannequin**

Beautiful woman,  
You are so pleasing to look at  
As you approach  
That I can only respond  
With a warm smile.  
But you don't smile back;

You float brusquely by  
With a frosty haughtiness,  
As though I had  
Horribly insulted you,  
Dissappointing me  
Only in the knowing  
That you have not realized  
Beauty is  
As beauty does.

*Robert Friedman*

### **Toothpaste for Twenty**

As I stuff my suitcase for California, my mother  
enters with the family-sized Colgate.  
"Other people on the plane will bring their own," I say,  
but she insists, "You'll be gone three weeks."

If I am delayed in Denver,  
or trapped in Tulsa,  
there will be supermarkets,  
but mothers see the end of civilization at the front door.  
They eye your clothing for holes and dirt,  
And you want to say, "Crash victims are never  
identified by their underwear," but don't.  
And in small gratitude for their nine swollen months,  
childbirth,  
sleepless years from babies' feedings and children's fears,  
and the awful angst of unbelief  
in your ability to cross the street, even at age 32,  
you take plenty of Woolite and sail into the friendly skies.

**Aldebaran 32**

Ma, if I am ever captured by cannibals,  
my skeleton will be found  
beside tartar-free teeth and cleansed clothes,  
and the natives will be worshipping my wallet photo of you,  
goddess of plenty.

*April Selley*

### **Moses's Nightmare**

Many times I have lain silent  
Looking backwards through the years  
At things that could have been me  
Many times I have lain silent

My soul cries out inside me, demanding  
To know why I deny myself

My soul cries silently, through my eyes,  
Only through eyes can cries be heard

My wish is follow; my destiny is to lead  
It is my fate to cavort as a clown on stage  
My soul cries to hide in the wings

I tire; arms hang useless in raveled sleeves

I sleep; there is no escape from the tempest in my soul

And my heart returns thunder when I wake.

*Christopher Lee Nichols*

## **The Guilt of Survivors**

After the last random rocket, after the last mile  
of rolling takeoff back to the world, I wondered  
if we'd crash, wash up days later in waves

off the China Sea, debris of history--  
not casualties of war, but dust flung off a buzz saw,  
filling for meat sold to black-market bidders.

I came back to the luxury of malls. All lost friends  
confound me, martyrs of fire and rockets.  
I knew a pilot who strapped an F-4 Phantom to his back

and flew until it killed him. He'd flown war missions  
over Italy and Korea. He could have boldly  
faded away with medals and grandchildren.

Before he crashed, did he bless, or curse us  
to live with ourselves? Did he dream of living  
never consumed, burning like Moses' holy bush?

*Walter McDonald*

## **Bread**

"Beware the yeast of the Pharisees."

"Because we've only one loaf," they said,  
"one literal loaf."

That third world woman, now, more street-smart  
picked up His poetry right away  
and the mother-hunger in His eyes.  
She caught the insult deftly and threw

## **Aldebaran 34**

back a pert quip. "But the dogs eat the  
crumbs that fall," she said.

She knew the difference between the  
wholesome, earthy dough and the spirit  
bread where the good seeps all through until  
the whole is leavened. And, oh, of course,  
between that and the demonic green  
fungi that take over the loaf and  
suck out the sweet soul.

These two were kneading love, hope, and faith  
unyeasted to last through the crushing  
of wheat and the rising of bread that  
could sign and live what it signed through death  
to eternity.

*Clarita Felhoelter*

### **Christmas**

Bones assembled from the dust,  
Awakened to the dawn,  
Freeze against the blazing depth  
Of humanness  
Chaliced in a crib.

Sinews cringe against the sight  
Of deity in flesh exposed  
Naked as a forest fire  
Fragile as a crystal cup  
Tilted on a rock.

Then Magi melt their golden thoughts  
And dare a sip of myrrh  
While the shepherds steel their tenderness  
To fondle Judah's lion

And little children dance and sing  
Because they have not dreamed of fear,  
Because they have no shield or staff  
But come all bare to worship here  
To clasp their infant brother close  
Until they grow to his estate  
Or perish in their fortresses  
And leave him wounded on the rocks  
Broken, bleeding, blazing in the dust  
Waiting, pleading, calling in the dusk  
Of Christmas always spilling dawn.

*Clarita Felhoelter*

### **This Dreadful Spinning as Dark Falls**

The brightly uniform attendants, briskly  
moving lines in the theme park convincingly disguise  
the confrontation with mortality  
inherent in amusement. But in the dingy  
midways set up in parking lots in small towns, sometimes,  
between a winter sunset and the lights stuttering on  
you'll see the metal frame black against the sky,  
tenuous cables holding the wheel onto the fragile  
base of the ferris wheel unlit and awful at dusk  
Try as you will, you cannot ignore  
dark staining the sky like drops of ink in a glass of water.  
The vagueness of the operator's eyes.  
His missing fingers.  
The painful condition of his shoes.

*Leigh Kirkland*

**Aldebaran 36**

## **Struck by the Sublime in the Night**

Electricity blasts the beach  
slices rectangles of noon banded by rails  
and wire walls. The Atlantic evaporates  
the colors reverse in the citronella flicker.  
In thunder our pupils reopen on gray  
porch beams. Low on the horizon  
a different storm outlines the quivering  
curve of the world. A dull fork branches into water.  
When the storm crosses, our vision  
has no chance to recover from jolts  
of white, black, blindness alternating adrenalin  
with a polarized photographic negative  
of nuclear burning in memory.  
We push against the shattering storm,  
gripping sweating glasses of vodka and soda.  
When the rain hits  
the electric cracks hard  
strobing shadows of the coastline  
jarring unfocused perspective.  
Thunder shudders the bones in our legs.

Rain.

The ocean ceases,  
sight, time, even you, only black and white:  
the tines jabbing strike burning  
blue-hot veins into the retina.

In the desert flashes in the sky will not mean rain.

*Leigh Kirkland*

## **Mica**

The duck pond overflowed  
my need for a sight. It's funny  
that you had to pull me by  
my jacket, the black leather  
that makes you feel new.  
I remember the black dog

And the spaniel puppies  
the fags brought, and  
Bailey in the pond to his  
neck, his body frantic, his  
muzzle snorting that sure  
rush of air past the limbs  
you hurled so far. You are

A strong woman and you  
kept on about the black dog  
and Bailey fighting before,  
right there, telling me so  
much that faded with the  
gray of a warm January,

Except the black dog  
plodding with his mouth  
closed, without a dog's  
smile. He has come to me;  
I must tell you how in  
dreams he does not breathe  
as he stalks me. I see



His teeth. On the other  
side you fill with breath  
your cupped, cold hands of  
January and try to warm them,  
your vision extended over  
and down to the duck pond  
like the long arm of an adolescent

Gypsy chanting what you  
heard about religion, chanting,  
"Prayer is the smile on a dog,  
prayer is the smile on a dog."  
But, prayer is the smile on a doll.  
In my prayer I can place  
his muzzle out of my

Face until a better time wills  
I should sate him. Somehow  
I see Bailey, too, and he  
is content to struggle with  
the water, circling, churning  
the mica silt that reflects  
the last of the merciful,  
wheeling sun.

*John E. Poch*

### **Before the Storm**

At the water's edge  
under the setting sun

small waves stretch  
the inferno's glow.

Slow lightening afar off  
outlines of your body  
lowering over me.

A soft breeze cools the sweat  
of our bodies. . .

leaves ripple, branches creak.

You move with rhythmic slap  
of water on the ocean shore.

*Robert Loudin*

### **Death Valley**

Albert and I drive toward  
the western boundary of  
Death Valley as the sun  
is setting. The spectacle  
of sand dunes, salt flats,  
and pastel-colored  
mountains is as beautiful  
as anything I've seen.  
We're listening to a  
recording of Dvorak's  
Symphony From the New World.  
It's the climax  
of the first movement,  
the Adagio; Allegro Molto,  
so neither of us is talking.  
In the twilight,  
the surrounding peaks  
display a palette of colors  
that I am surprised

### **Aldebaran 40**

During the last three days  
we visited all the  
scenic spots with names  
like Red Cathedral,  
Wildrose Canyon, and  
Furnace Creek. Now, as  
we speed along high above  
the valley floor,  
I feel calm and tranquil  
yet oddly overwhelmed  
by the intensity of  
my peace. At this moment,  
I am so thrilled to be  
alive that even the idea  
of death does not sadden me.  
When the symphony's slow  
movement finishes, Albert  
accelerates to match the  
tempo of the Scherzo. He  
looks over at me, and smiles  
as if he knows my thoughts,  
but I am picturing the  
people on the first wagon  
train who were stranded in  
this harsh and awesome place.  
I consider the irony  
of dying amid such splendor,  
and understand more  
passionately than I wish  
that we too face death.  
The sound of wind  
rushing past the car and  
the engine's steady hum  
accompany the music which  
moves in a crescendo to the

finale, Allegro con fuoco.  
Albert caresses my arm  
smoothing its goosebumps, and  
I swallow to clear the  
fullness from my throat.  
Then I turn away to look out  
the window because the coda  
might make me cry.

*Ronald Alexander*

### **Lost and Found #2 - May 1990**

Excuse me, sir, there's a question I must ask  
Has anyone turned in my "smiling mask"?  
I misplaced it somewhere, a long time ago  
Exactly where and when, perhaps I'll never know  
Maybe it was dropped on the road by the seashore  
You know, the long and winding one that leads to your door  
I was so neglectful, so careless with it  
Truly unappreciative, I'm willing to admit  
When the pavement got bumpy, it might've been tossed. . .  
From my car which was "jumpy", and now is lost  
So, please excuse my nebulous condition  
Without my mask, what remains is a mere apparition  
Lacking substance, I'm feeling strange and odd  
Won't you help me find my missing facade.

*David Ilson*

## Good Habits Make Life Easier

Live by ritual, by habit, and life will never throw you any surprises.

My mother used to say that, or something like it. I guess I learned it well.

Saturdays, my ritual begins first thing. While I'm still in bed, just easing awake, I close my eyes tight against the unevenly-textured ceiling of the bedroom, and I try to imagine Bill in bed beside me. I imagine him rolling over, still asleep, sighing as he throws one strong, tanned arm across my stomach. I open my eyes and make this dangerous image disappear. I close them and let Bill return.

Although we have been seeing one another for nearly a year, Bill rarely stays overnight. He's not much of a staying-over type of guy, he says. He likes to keep his little Maggie special, he tells me, a secret treat away from home--a dessert of sorts, I guess.

Of course he's married.

The first part of my Saturday ritual, the imagining part, goes on for an hour or more. It goes on until I can no longer bring myself to accept the two pillows wedged beside me as anything other than two wilted pillows. It goes on until I've had all I can stand of trying to see Bill as *my* husband instead of hers, until I can no longer stand just *imagining* all the things he'd be doing to me this morning and every morning, and I have to scramble for a shower first blistering hot and then numbing cold and then colder still.

After my shower, I walk naked into the kitchen and do all the typical morning things. I feed the cat (a present from Bill--from a litter of kittens his wife's cat had six months ago), I make coffee, I pour some juice, I toast a bagel. I climb back into the bed I never bother to make on Saturdays, eat my small breakfast, drink my coffee, and contemplate new and interesting ways to kill Bill's wife.

I know what you're thinking. I know what you have

every right to be thinking.

I should just get over him, I should just get on with it, I should just get a life.

The truth is, I already have one. I already have a perfectly ordinary, boring, uneventful five-day-a-week life in a publishing house downtown.

My Saturday ritual is only a way of making that two-day lull between Friday and Monday seem slightly more manageable, a little less overwhelming. Living by habit, you know how each interminable hour will be spent. You know that each minute will slip away in due course as part of the plan, part of the ritual, and that you will survive it. You know you will endure. This is more comforting than it sounds.

Sometime shortly after noon I get out of bed, dress in faded sweatpants and one of Bill's old baseball shirts, and go through the motions of cleaning the apartment. In truth, the apartment is already clean, but the act of cleaning is soothing, calming, an easy way to fall into the self-hypnosis necessary to manage the free time I have between work and Bill's visits. I clean a lot.

While I mutter about the apartment, I usually play a good, weepy cassette--Jane Olivor is good for cloudy days, Taylor Dayne works if I'm feeling somewhat hopeful. I clean and dance, I sing along with the songs I know. I pull down old photo albums, write wistful letters to former friends who'll probably remember me only vaguely, sometimes I call my mother in her cheery pink room in the nursing home across town. The afternoon flies.

Around four o'clock, I start to get antsy. The first tentative barb of a potential headache pokes and prods at the back of my skull. I sometimes notice my thigh muscles flexing and contracting involuntarily.

I go to my bookshelf, find a slim volume of short stories I haven't read in awhile. I take the book into the bathroom and draw a bath so hot I can stand it only by sheer force of will. I fill the tub as close to the rim as I dare, sink

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myself into that gleaming white cauldron, and read.

I read until the water is only lukewarm, as many stories as I can manage in that time, one after another. The stories flow together and swirl through my head like some haphazard, undisciplined novel. The characters change names and positions in life, the setting changes, yet all of the stories seem ultimately part of a single, messy narrative.

The water lulls me to a point just before sleep. I often find myself turning page after page without actually connecting with any of the words at all. Once in awhile I'll turn back a few pages to try to recapture the flow of a particular story, but really the book--like so many things--is just there out of habit. I started reading in the bathtub at some point in my life; therefore, I read in the bathtub now.

When the water has cooled sufficiently, I set aside my book and go about the ritual of bathing. I start with my feet and work my way up. I slather cocoa-butter soap on every inch of my skin. The suds glide across my skin and I close my eyes and imagine Bill in a soapy caress.

I imagine his hands moving along the backs of my knees, up along my inner thighs. They linger for a moment, ease up over my stomach, come to rest just below my breasts. I imagine his thumbs working my nipples in small circles that grow larger. I think of the way he cups my breasts in his strong hands just before he kisses me. Finally, finally, I let myself feel Bill's fingers gliding to my throat, to my shoulders, to the back of my neck. I open my eyes.

With a soft washcloth, I scrub my face and neck. I run more hot water onto the cloth and lay it over my face for several minutes. I want every pore completely open. I take two large dollops of moisturizer and massage them into my forehead, my cheeks, my chin, my throat. I let the cream soak in while the water drains from the tub. Then I stand and shower under slightly cool water. I wash my hair with coconut shampoo, condition with an orange-scented rinse. I dry off, smooth in more moisturizer, and dress. I wait.

Bill doesn't come.

Saturday night, the night Bill's wife *always* works the second shift at the hospital, the night I prepare for, long for, work towards--and Bill doesn't show.

Bill *rarely* shows; this, too, is part of the ritual.

I wait a long time. I make a sharp Jim Beam and tonic. I sit in the dark and play some nostalgic tape--the Beatles, the Beach Boys, something Bill's taped for me off his wife's old albums. I hold the cat--Bill's wife's music, Bill's wife's cat.

Finally I call my brother, Ted, who waits for my call, who now stays home Saturday nights just waiting.

Teddy, can you come over please? I'm feeling kind of blue, I'm feeling kind of down.

Ted arrives twenty minutes later. He's thought ahead and carries several videos and a carton of Ben & Jerry's Chunky Monkey ice cream.

Oh Maggie, he says. Oh, Maggley-waggley.

We pop in one of the movies and trade the ice cream back and forth. We use the same spoon. Teddy saves the biggest chunks of chocolate for me; he's a good big brother.

Teddy always falls asleep during the second movie. I grab a comforter from the hall closet and tuck it around him on the sofa. I have a quiet cry during the third movie and then curl up on top of the comforter next to him. I leave the television on with the sound turned down in case Teddy wakes up in the middle of the night; he used to be afraid of the dark, I remember.

Sunday morning, we're awakened by the sound of the apartment buzzer--an insistent, commanding drone. Teddy bolts awake, eyes wide, momentarily disoriented. I stumble to the door.

Of course it's Bill.

Hey there, sleepyheads, he says. How about some brunch? How's it going, Teddy? Hey, baby.

Teddy grumbles something and shuffles into my bedroom to finish his sleep.

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So where the hell were you? I say. I waited and waited. I always wait and wait.

Oh, Maggie, Bill says. Did we have something going last night? He's wearing a wrinkled shirt that his wife would not have allowed out of her house, he smells vaguely beery and also maybe faintly of some soft floral scent neither his wife nor I would every consider.

I was out with the guys last night, he says. You know, we get to drinking, carrying on. I guess I just clean forgot about you, baby. I'm sorry. I just forgot you for a minute.

He sees I'm not going to respond on my own, so he asks that fatal question.

So what did *you* do?

I just sat here and fell more and more in love with you, I say.

He looks at me for a minute, and then busts out laughing.

He laughs like I've just said the funniest thing he's ever heard.

He laughs like it's the biggest joke in the world.

Because it's part of our ritual, though, I'm ready for him.

Just out of habit, I laugh too.

*Troy Tradup*

### **In the Mouth of Dis**

"Are you absolutely sure?"

"Yes," replied my interlocutor.

"It is with a great deal of trepidation that I relate the events of that fateful day, you realize?"

"I know."

"Very well. If you insist," I said, shaking my head in disbelief, and began:

"The Maple Leaf flew proudly at full mast outside of Saint Judas High School. I wondered to myself if they would remember to put it at half mast tomorrow: It was Saint Judas' Day. The hustle and bustle in the hallways was dying down as the students made their way to the first morning class. Inside room 214, most of the students had taken their seats while the rest mulled about the room talking to their friends. Ms. Bradshaw paced her usual nervous path in front of the classroom; carefully reading her lesson plan for the day. English was not, as the saying goes, her forte.

"I have never seen any woman who looked so out of place in a dress. Whenever she wore one, she walked as if she was wearing a coarse gunny. Not that Ms. Bradshaw was an unattractive woman. She was feminine in her own, physically fit sort of way.

"The desk beside me was curiously empty. It was within minutes of bell time and the chair's occupant had never been late for a class as long as I had known him. Perhaps there was a line up at the cafeteria, I remember thinking; but still, I could not help but worry.

"As if in answer to my thoughts, he walked into the classroom. Perhaps 'walked' is slightly misleading. Jeffy did not walk so much as he ambled. The cause of his unusual locution was his extra large feet, rotund build and short stature. I could not help but picture the caricature of the hobo clown with the size twenty shoes whenever I saw Jeffy walking. With

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one final polish on his purple, polyester shirt, Jeffy laid an apple on the teacher's desk. 'Thank you, Jeffy,' Ms. Bradshaw said politely. Jeffy just smiled and took his seat. Now, in any normal classroom, with any normal individual, this would seem too cliché to be true. For such an act, the person would immediately be teased into another school. This class, however, barely took notice of Jeffy's kind act. It was so commonplace that if Jeffy failed to bring an apple to whomever he had first period, the teacher would send him directly to the school nurse for an examination.

"The bell rang and the students who had been chatting, quietly took their seats. 'O.K.,' announced Ms. Bradshaw, 'Let's go over the play one more time.' There was a general moan from the class. 'Just once more before your test tomorrow. Now, who can tell me what year Shakespeare wrote the play?' She paced the full girth of the classroom as she spoke, clutching her notes carefully. Jeffy raised his hand emphatically. 'Yes, Mr. Jefferson.'

"Before Jeffy could answer, the door opened and in walked Cindy Swayze. 'Sorry I'm late, Ms. Bradshaw,' Cindy apologized as she drifted ethereally to her desk. Before sitting down, she looked over at Bill Baxter and winked. Cindy was the type of woman who looked so natural in a dress, that you almost thought she was born wearing one. Cindy did not just dress in the latest fashions, but, in fact, was the fashion trend setter. Most of the other girls in the school decided what clothes were in or out of style, in any given month, by what Cindy Swayze was wearing.

"I was asking the class what year the play was written in?" Ms. Bradshaw paused to let Cindy answer.

"Ah. . . 1789?" She answered. I must confess that I felt a visceral attraction for Cindy; however, her intellect always left much to be desired.

"Jeffy was again jumping up and down in his seat as if he had a fire underneath him. The teacher nodded to him.

'1599!' he announced proudly.

"Ms. Bradshaw flipped a page of her notes and, with a patronizing tone, said, 'Very, very good. Who can tell me what character gives Caesar's eulogy?' No one volunteered. 'Mr. MacDonald?'

"'Mark Antony.' Dave offered the answer in the same tone of anxious boredom that one would use for reciting the final Hail Mary in a lengthy penance.

"'Right, David.' She flipped through her notes, looking for another banal question. Then surveyed the class for a respondent. 'Mr. Baxter, can you tell me who it was that betrayed Caesar?'

"Bill Baxter had been dividing his attention between staring out the window and ogling Cindy's legs. 'What was the question again, Ms. Bradshaw?'

"The would-be English teacher gave a little sigh and said, 'I guess you have had your mind on the gymnastics meet this weekend.'

"'Yeah. . . yeah, I've been kinda distracted by that for awhile.' Every school has its own hero. Usually this local hero is the star in whatever sport the school triumphs. At St. Judas, the sport was gymnastics and the star was Bill Baxter. Things had not always been this way for him. In junior high, Bill Baxter had been skinny to the point of emaciation and had no apparent aptitudes. When he and Jeffy hung around together, as they often did in those days, they looked like a bad Laurel and Hardy impersonation.

"All that changed when he reached high school and, with Jeffy's cajolement, joined the gymnastics team. This was his niche. So skilled was he at the bars, the rings, the parallel bars, et cetera, that he almost instantly acquired the title of the most popular guy in the school, with Cindy Swayze as the prize. It was not long after that that the magalomania set in. If there was ever a youth absolutely convinced of his own immortality, it was Bill Baxter.

"'No need to worry,' Ms. Bradshaw said, 'With you on the team we're going to kick. . .' Embarrassed by her near faux  
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pas, she stammered to finish her sentence. Finally, she added weakly, 'those other teams. . .all over the gym.' Besides Jeffy and Bill Baxter, Ms. Bradshaw was probably more excited about the up-coming gym meet than anybody else. She had coached the female team for the past ten years and, before her recent appointment to the English department, taught all the female gym classes.

"The rest of the class went by uneventfully. It was not until after school that I saw Jeffy again. He was in the gym before anyone else and had all the equipment set up before the team arrived. Bill Baxter entered the gymnasium like a gladiator entering the coliseum. 'Hi Billy,' Jeffy cried out but Bill Baxter (who hated this old nickname by the way) simply walked past him and chalked up his hands. He grabbed onto the rings which were dangling from the ceiling and began his practice. He always began with his strength routine. Holding the rings to his sides, he would slowly move them outwards until both his arms were parallel with the floor. Even today, I have never seen anyone who can hold this position for as long as Bill Baxter could.

"Cindy entered the gym with a group of her cheerleader friends. 'Oh Bill,' she called out, 'We just came in to watch you practice. Is that o.k.?' Bill Baxter nodded his approval. They sat on the bleachers close to Jeffy. The grin of Jeffy's blushed face went from one red ear to the other and exposed his badly bucked teeth. You see, he was also smitten by this young lady. When Cindy noticed her admirer, (a great feat of observation for someone with her limited scope) she grimaced and ushered her friends to another bleacher.

"It was the dismount that Bill Baxter was particularly concerned with on that day. Repeatedly, he swung himself around, let go of the rings, did as many somersaults as possible and always landed in perfect form on the mat. He would have been a great gymnast.

"That's great, Billy. I wish I could do that,' Jeffy

cheered

"Bill Baxter ignored the compliment until he noticed some of his teammates looking at him querulously. 'Why don't you come over here and give it a try, Jeffy?'

"'I don't know, Billy. I'm kinda scared of heights.' From the floor to the bottom of the rings, it was almost twice Jeffy's height.

"'Come on. Show us what you can do,' Bill Baxter implored. Jeffy shuffled over to the rings with an awkward, embarrassed smile. In general, Jeffy shunned any public display of physical exertion; however, when Bill Baxter asked him to do something, Jeffy always did it. The gymnasts had stopped their own workouts and gathered around the rings. Bill Baxter placed the stepping box under the rings for him and Jeffy lumbered onto it. He looked up at the bars dangling a few feet from his head. With the expression on his face, you could easily tell what he was thinking: 'Those rings are an awful long way up.'

"Even with the box, Jeffy could not reach the rings. Bill Baxter and somebody else - I cannot remember who - had to lift him up slightly. As soon as he grasped the rings, Bill Baxter grabbed the box from under him and stepped back. 'Hey! Hey!' Jeffy kept yelling. 'I can't get down! Put the box back, Billy! I can't hold on.' The gathered crowd looked at Bill Baxter clutching the box at his side; but none of them dared to take it from him. Jeffy started kicking wildly in an attempt to hold onto the rings. Cindy and her friends started laughing. This brought on the laughter of everyone else except for Bill Baxter who just watched Jeffy desperately struggling like a fish caught on a hook. 'I'm going to fall!' he screamed. 'Please Billy! Put the box back!'

"When Jeffy landed it was with a loud thud. He lay on the mat, dazed for a minute, then sat up and started rubbing his behind. 'All in good fun, eh Jeffy,' Bill Baxter said, giving him a pat on the head.

"'Yeah Billy,' Jeffy replied, 'all in good fun.'

I paused for a moment and looked at the young man seated before me. "Are you sure you want me to continue?"

"Yes, quite sure," he answered, but this time I noticed a slight hesitation in his voice.

"After the practice, Jeffy put away all the equipment. He got his jacket and books from his locker and ran up the long side street after the others. 'Hey guys! Wait for me!' Jeffy called from behind.

"'Oh Bill, does that retarded friend of yours have to walk with us?' whined Cindy.

"'He's not my friend, I told you,' insisted Bill Baxter. They did not wait for him and Jeffy found it difficult for his short legs to carry his round body.

"As Jeffy caught up with them, one of the athletes tripped him. The group erupted with laughter. 'That's all right, guys,' said Jeffy as he struggled to get up. 'I bet you're the best gymnast in the whole school, Billy.'

"'You got that right, Dumbo,' replied Bill Baxter. 'And this weekend I'm going to prove that I'm the best gymnast in Toronto.'

"The nights come early in the late fall. By the time the team had finished practice, showered up and started heading home, the sky was already pitch dark. The temperature had dropped precipitously that day; so that it was now cold enough to see your breath. A set of headlights appeared on the one-way street, heading towards the students.

"'Watch this,' Bill Baxter whispered to his girlfriend. 'Hey Jeffy, why don't you run between the motorcycles?'

"Jeffy looked up at the encroaching headlights. 'O.K.' he agreed and started running down the street with his head looking at the ground in a determined manner. The group doubled over with laughter as they watched him stumble off at full tilt towards the car's headlights. Everyone roared except, of course, Bill Baxter. He stood watching Jeffy and waiting for the car to eventually slow down. 'I can't wait to see his face

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when he realizes it's a car,' Cindy said in between fits of laughter.

"Suddenly, Baxter's face went flush. Sweat started to form instantaneously on his forehead until his whole face was wet. In the cold night air, he looked as if he was covered with ice. The car was not stopping. In fact, it was accelerating and heading straight for Jeffy.

"'Oh my God,' mumbled Bill Baxter. 'He's not even looking.' Then, he started screaming, 'Jeffy! Jeffy! Look out!' but Jeffy was too intent on his task to hear him. 'Stop! Stop!' Bill Baxter yelled as he tore off down the road towards the car.

"Bill Baxter reached Jeffy in the nick of time to push him out of the way; but it was too late for himself. He could only stare at the blinding lights in pure terror and yell out, 'Lord, I deserve it!'

Two motorcycles passed on either side of Bill Baxter."

*T. G. Sheppard*



## **Round**

"You're so beautiful, baby. So white. . . so soft. . . so warm. A Renoir, a Rubens come to life. Why should **you** suffer if men's tastes have soured?"

Not even her most egregious, wish-fulfilling dreams were half so flattering, and this had been no dream, no matter how unreal it had felt.

He had started at the nape of her neck, then nuzzled down along her spine, reaching around to caress her belly and hips. Lower, he had held his cheek against her bottom, groaning softly. She had groaned too, peeking over her shoulder to where his tuft of reddish hair tickled her skin. His eyes were closed, his expression dense and concentrated, ecstatic. She had nearly fainted from the pleasure of looking at him.

Even now, remembering it, she found herself clutching the lip of the cash-drawer.

"Don't be afraid," he had urged her on. "Use your weight, your roundness. I want to feel you in your entirety."

And she had granted his desire--self-consciously at first, but after a while, with considerable abandon.

She had had a few men before (a very few), but those encounters had evolved out of mutual desperation; had played themselves out as a mutual embarrassment. **This** had been more liberation than confirmation.

"Now," he had commanded her, "on your back, on the bed. Let me see all of you. Let me see everything you have to offer."

She had had no reason to say no.

The young Latin on the other side of the glass thumped on the counterledge, waking her from her reverie.

"**Porka!**" he mumbled.

Any other day it might have reduced her to tears.

"Sorry," she colored, stamping his check and counting out the bills.

She pushed them through the slot and he hurried away, his place taken immediately by an old woman with whom she exchanged pleasantries in Italian.

Although Helene had worked at the bank seven years and assumed a good portion of the managerial responsibilities, she officially remained a "teller". Worse, she seemed to have served as springboard for several of her less educated or experienced co-workers. On the one occasion she had registered a mild protest with the main office, she had been told she was "too valuable to move." She "held the Newark branch together." (Like Atlas, she supposed.) Her "facility for languages" was "ideally suited to her location." But behind all this smoke, she sensed the blunter truth: they considered her fat; too "unprofessional" in appearance. They'd let her handle the small change, but she was too broad for boardrooms and business lunches. (Who would entrust their money to someone who took thirds at the dessert bar?)

At times she feared she would never escape the Newark branch. At even darker times she imagined the day she topped 300 pounds she would destroy herself. At an average of eight pounds yearly (taking into account the fluctuations of a dozen different diets), she didn't have too, too far to go. "But I have change to make/And pizzas to eat before I sleep/And pizzas to eat before I sleep."

But her habitual retreat behind such morbid and self-flagellating humor seemed less necessary now. Imagine--a kind, intelligent, attractive man who **fawned upon** her size! It felt like salvation, resurrection, a fairy tale from other people's lives.

During the two years Gene had been coming in the bank, a casual, flirtatious repartee had slowly developed between them. Of course, she had attributed this to sheer disinterested gallantry on his part. He was simply too good-looking and successful for her to take him seriously. Tall and muscular with curly red hair and a scant dusting of freckles, he co-owned a lumberyard that supplied the two largest

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condominium developers in New Jersey. As a rule he dressed in workboots and flannels, but occasionally he appeared in expensive Italian suits. He had a business degree from Fordham, and had spent two years with a brokerage house in New York before "striking forth" on his own. In the beginning he wore a ring, but that had come off some time ago.

Then suddenly, the previous afternoon, without checkbook, deposit slip, or other financial motive, he appeared at the window and asked what time she finished work.

"Around four-thirty. Why?"

"How 'bout dinner?"

"Are you serious?"

"Of course I'm serious. I've always wondered how you'd look without all that glass between us."

She glanced up at the security camera as if expecting Alan Funt.

"Do you want to meet somewhere? Should I go home first and change? I mean, I don't know if I'm dressed all right."

"You look fine. Better than fine, really." He put his lips to the grated opening and whispered: "I know only one way you'd look better."

Inwardly, she recoiled as if he had pointed a gun at her. She felt an urge to run, to duck under the counter, to trigger the silent alarm. Had he really expressed a desire to see her naked, or had she misunderstood?

"All right," she managed an awkward smile.

"Four-thirty, then?"

"Fine."

His sports car pulled up nearer to five, just as she had begun to fear she had been played for a joke. Climbing in, she suppressed a comment about "needing a shoehorn." Beneath her, the narrow bucket seat felt like a milking stool. Gene, at first, had some difficulty changing gears, but rather than growing frustrated, his hand seemingly lingered on the shift as it brushed against her leg.

"You can adjust that seat if you're cramped," he

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suggested after awhile.

She fumbled with the lever for nearly a minute before it shot back with a loud "thunk". She prayed she had not broken a spring or knocked it off its track.

They drove several miles up Bloomfield Avenue, then North on 23 past Wayne.

"Why so far?" she had inquired.

"There's a really good seafood restaurant in Hamburg." After a lengthy pause he added apologetically: "You do like seafood, I hope. I should have asked."

"I love seafood," she answered with an enthusiasm that left her wanting to punch her head.

"No," he laughed, "I can't imagine you being too finicky."

For a second she felt hurt, but upon fumbling with the shift again, he overtly placed his hand on her thigh.

"You don't mind, do you?" he asked, making soft, electric circles with his fingers.

"No," she swallowed, "I don't mind."

Slowly his hand drifted upward.

"Maybe you'd better drive," she whispered at last, feeling vaguely faint.

\* \* \* \* \*

After Trina returned from lunch and relieved her at the counter, Helene moved into the tiny office located between the vault and the "drive-thru" window. As she shuffled the half-dozen loan applications Mrs. DeMartino had asked her to process, she again felt the injustice of her position. Technically, such chores were not part of her job description. She got nothing for it: no money, no credit, usually not even a "Thank you." Gene was right: she took all kinds of crap from people.

Well, all that was going to change. Starting now, she would put her foot down, demand her true value. If they didn't like it she would go elsewhere. Elsewhere. . . She would go to work for Gene and prove so invaluable that within a year he

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would make her a partner. Together they would put his business on the stock exchange, take it "international".

Helene caught herself and smiled at the excesses of her imagination. Let her tend to her own business first. She pushed the applications aside, removed a sheet of paper from the drawer, and began a letter to the district manager. But between her exhilaration at taking a stand and the continual rasping of the "drive-thru" speaker, she found it difficult to concentrate. Before long, her mind wandered back to the events of the previous evening.

The walls and ceilings of the dark little restaurant were draped with the obligatory fish nets, crab pots, and lobster traps.

As she hung her jacket up she knocked a coat-hanger to the floor, the jarring rattle making her go hot all over. She looked way, way down at it, then back up at him. He was smiling, a little cruelly it seemed.

Well, are you waiting for me to play the gentleman, or are you too shy to bend over. . .? He let the question hang. . . cause if it's the latter, I assure you I'd find the sight more a turn-on than anything else."

"You can get it," she drew her breath steadily.

"You disappoint me," he genuflected.

They were shown to a corner table.

"So, what looks good?" he asked over the menu.

"I thought maybe a salad, and the broiled shrimp."

"C'mon," he chided with a devilish smirk, "the combo-platter is especially good."

She gave in without a struggle.

When the waitress asked if they wanted the complete dinner or a la carte, he made the decision for her.

"Are you trying to get me fat?" she joked uncertainly. after the woman had gone.

"Actually," he smiled, "I'm looking forward to the pleasure of watching you eat." But then he turned serious:

"Never be ashamed of your appetite. To the right men, your

**Aldebaran 59**

body is just as pleasing as anyone else's. I mean, who dictates the standard of beauty anyway? Homosexual fashion designers who'd have everyone look like fifteen year old boys. What's really depressing is that the whole culture's bought into it: women lifting weights, wearing shoulder pads, killing themselves to look the way most men don't even like. It's perverse. Historically, the big woman has always been the ideal. And she's coming back."

Helene needed a sip of beer, two sips, to help swallow this.

"Was your wife big?" she asked.

"Not where it counted," he tapped his chest solemnly.

"Mean! Mean! A witch!"

"Any kids?"

"No kids."

The salads came, thickly coated with blue cheese dressing.

"What about you?" he inquired. "Were you always big?"

"Always."

Responding to his attentiveness and apparent sincerity, she related some of her most embarrassing and painful memories in this regard.

Once, in fourth grade music class, a few of the students had put their heads together and altered the lyrics to **My Girl Sal**. With each repetition of the song, two or three more joined in until practically the entire class was singing: "I've got a mule and her name is Sal/Fifteen miles on Helene Cassale." Sister Agatha, her would-be defender, had only added to her tears. She leapt up from the piano and scolded the class for "torturing the poor girl because she's fat." Perhaps she "couldn't help it." Perhaps she had "a glandular problem." They should all "say a prayer of Thanksgiving" because "there but for the Grace of God. . ." (Finally she understood: it was a cosmic conspiracy. "WHO MADE ME?" "God made me." "HOW DID HE MAKE ME?" "He made me fat.")

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Like all sorrows, it was a cross to be borne. And she bore it daily. She filled the back of every row, brought up the rear in every line. She was the last to relieve her bladder (at least the seat was always warm), the last to receive Communion, the climactic float of every Lenten procession.

And then, of course, there was the contumely, the names: all the words ending in Y, all the comparisons to barnyard, zoo, and circus animals. Her very first crush had called her a pig to rid himself of her attentions. It was right about then that she stopped being so enamored and forgiving of God. She filled this sudden vacuum the only way she knew how: by filling her face.

A handful of sympathetic classmates periodically reminded her that kids were cruel, and that things couldn't fail to improve as she got older. High school would be better, they assured her. But when the time came, it seemed she spent her entire adolescence waiting for her contemporaries to grow up. She'd like to tell him stories about sloppy first kisses or disastrous prom dates, but she didn't know any.

When at last her teenage nightmare ended and she found herself at college, she felt certain the worst was behind her. Imagine her disappointment then, when her panties were stolen from her dorm and hoisted up the quadrangle flagpole; when the frat brothers assigned her negative numbers as they rated the coeds passing through the cafeteria. (Though, truthfully, these bothered her less than the ones who held up a twinkie or yodel and then pointed to their crotch.) One could safely assume a connection between her superior grades and her habit of taking refuge in the library.

To answer his question then--yes, she was always big.

In relating the edited, less consciously self-pitying version of these humiliations, Helene had endeavored to maintain a comic tone. But Gene listened throughout without so much as a smile.

"Why do you insist on ridiculing yourself?" he asked when she had finished. "There are plenty of big women who

don't feel such a need. I think it goes beyond your weight, your size."

"What does?" she inquired apprehensively.

"Your self-loathing."

"What makes you think I loathe myself?" she whispered, looking down at her plate, empty but for various mollusk shells and a half-eaten baby squid.

She felt his fingers suddenly under her chin and raised her eyes. He was leaning forward, the upward funnel of light shining directly on his tanned, freckled face.

"Because you're obviously smart as hell--also, warm, kind-hearted, and funny. And yet, when I come in the bank, I see you taking all kinds of crap from people. I see someone used to being walked on; someone much too grateful for the smallest kindness. You put on a good front, but I see how miserable you look when you don't think anyone's watching." He paused, the candle-fire burnishing a stray forelock of his rust-colored hair. "I watch. I watch you all the time. I **know**. And I say to myself, 'This isn't right. This woman deserves better.'"

The intensity of his words caused her to back away slightly. A long silence followed before she could respond.

"Yes, I am unhappy. I guess I've always been unhappy. And maybe it does go beyond my 'size'. Maybe it is partly cultural too. . . being Italian. . . and Catholic. I mean, I know all the lessons on the 'inferiority of women.' I know I always resented my brothers. . . always felt they were loved more. . . respected. . . ." But then she laughed. "What nonsense, right? I sure don't know. Maybe it is just a question of 'size'. Maybe you just start out as a fat little girl and it marshmallows from there. Maybe you just get used to certain things. Don't think I haven't tried to understand it. I've done little else all my life. I just know it's something that's always seemed beyond my control."

"Well, why don't we change all that," he whispered firmly. "Starting right now. I can help you, but you have to

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trust me."

"Whatever."

"No, I'm very serious," he went on. "I don't want you to think of it as a game. What I'm asking for is complete control. Put yourself in my hands and before the clock strikes midnight you won't recognize yourself. I won't abuse your trust, but I won't tolerate any cowardness either. You've suffered too long to see things clearly; to know what you need anymore. Only another can help you. You see, somehow you've accepted the idea that your misery is set in stone. That's the first thing that has to change. And it **will** change if you say the word." He stared at her hard. "Yes or no, Helene."

For someone who regularly fantasized leaping off tall buildings, the leap he asked of her proved exhilarating.

"Whatever," she repeated.

"Great," he leaned back in the chair, "we can begin: I think you're very beautiful."

She lowered her eyes immediately to her plate.

"Don't blush," he commanded. "Look at me. I think you're very beautiful. Now; what do you say to that?"

"What should I . . ."

"No; wrong," he interrupted. "I think you're very beautiful."

"I don't. . ."

"No; wrong again! I'm gonna keep saying it 'till you get it right. I think you're very beautiful."

Suddenly the light went on in her head.

"Thank you," she smiled.

"**There** you go," he laughed loudly. "See how easy that was?"

After a thick slice of blueberry cheesecake they went to her apartment: his Doberman, he explained, did not take kindly to strangers.

Helene read over the paper, but the half-dozen lines she had managed to scribble failed to convey a proper sense of her firmness and determination. The desired balance between

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righteous anger and frank insistence required more concentration than she could muster at the moment. She'd be better off waiting until that evening when she could write it at her leisure. Closing her eyes, she leaned back in the chair and twirled the nub of the pen between her lips, humming noiselessly.

A low rumble had sounded deep in his throat as he gripped the back of her shoulders. His eyes opened and closed, by turns warm, distant, and delirious. She nibbled, then kissed wildly, at his lips. He returned her kisses in kind before sinking his entire face between her neck and collarbone, the rumbling becoming progressively higher and more sustained, like the chanting of a mantra. The ceiling slowly collapsed onto its side, then receded like a camera trick, gradually fading to black in a hot, wet, wind-swept place. The mantra broke. Steaming sunshine shot from her breast. A door flew open and she hurtled weightlessly through space.

"Oh! Oh! Baby! My cloud! My pillow! Pull me in! Pull me **in**!"

"I'm afraid I've quite a load here, honey." It was the same voice that had just been sounding in her head, coming now over the speaker in the booth. "One. . . two. . . three. . . and this as well--each to the separate accounts."

The mechanical "clack" of the receiving drawer unbolting jolted all her senses. She understood everything at once. To her knowledge Gene had never used the "drive-thru" before: he was purposely avoiding her. She crept to the door and peeked out to where he was parked beyond the window. He slouched low in the seat, a pair of sunglasses over his eyes, his fingers - inside her only twelve hours earlier - restlessly tapping a drumbeat on the dashboard.

\* \* \* \* \*

The pizza and beer she had bought on the way home did nothing to ease her pain and anger at being used. Nor did the TV have its usual tranquilizing effect: she couldn't stop herself from analyzing Gene's motivations. She wanted to

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dismiss him as "selfish", but she discerned the possibility of genuine maliciousness in his behavior. In a way, their encounter resembled the premise of a TV show she used to watch as a child: in it, a wealthy stranger would give some poor bozo a million dollars just to see how horribly it would screw up their life. It was sadism masquerading as charity. Viewed from this perspective, Gene's every word, every gesture, every caress, writhed like a serpent in her heart. She could imagine him laughing over it now.

In the course of her suffering however, yet another possibility presented itself: that Gene really **did** like her--for the very reason he wouldn't allow himself to be seen with her. For all his criticism of her self-consciousness, perhaps **he** was the one who was embarrassed. Still, the idea that he was merely a coward tasted only slightly less bitter than the sting of being victimized.

When at last the beer had run out, Helene shut off the TV and went into the bathroom to shower. She set the water at a punishing temperature and removed her clothing. As she stepped back from the hamper however, she caught sight of herself in the mirror above the sink.

"I think you're very beautiful," she mocked in a squeaking falsetto.

She lunged at the drinking glass and reared back to fire it.

"No! Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!" she hollered.

Shaking violently, she returned it to the holder.

Almost unconsciously at first, she traced a hand gently across her belly, then down between her legs, caressing herself for one of the few times in her life.

*James Theobald*

## **The Flower Cart**

The cart was old and worn but it worked well. It had been newly sanded and painted a fresh green, and after Jack placed containers of pink snapdragon across the top of the cart it seemed as servicable as any new cart. On the sidewalk, next to the tall wheels, Jack pushed containers of daises and iris together, the purple contrasting and blending with the white, like a painting done with rich, true colors. Jack finished setting up by filling each container with fresh water that he had carried from across the street.

Sitting in the coffee shop down the street, Harry watched Jack struggle with the heavy bucket. He stubbed out his cigarette in the glass ashtray and blew a thin stream of smoke through his lips.

He hadn't seen Jack in five years, maybe ten. What was he doing the last time he saw him? Newspapers, that was it. He had been getting up at 4:00 a.m. every day to fill newspaper machines along the streets, in the hospital lobby, and down at the train station. Yeah, Jack was good at getting steady work. The time before that Harry seemed to remember Jack working at the high school, late at night, sweeping long, empty hallways. He was good at getting steady work.

Now this flower cart business. Jack had told him last evening that he had bought the cart for a good price and he did pretty well selling flowers; people bought them all day long, no matter the season. It beat Harry, why people paid good cash for something they knew would be dead in two days. Dead and brown and their three dollars gone. But Harry needed money just now and was willing to help Jack sell his flowers for a day or two.

Harry looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter. 6:15. Jack had told him to come about that time. Jack wanted to get to the hospital to see his wife before they took her to surgery. Jack promised Harry the profits of the day for working the cart for him. Harry figured selling flowers

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could hardly be described as heavy labor.

Harry watched Jack put the bucket for hauling water behind the cart. He paid for his coffee and walked out the door toward the flower cart.

"Morning, Jack," Harry said, as he approached the cart. He pulled at his right ear lobe then stuck both hands in his pockets. Jack straightened up from a tall bunch of purple flowers, and glanced at his watch. "Harry! Good to see you! I sure appreciate your help."

"No problem." Harry played with the change in his pockets.

"The cash box is in the drawer, here, in the cart. I left \$20.00 in change. If you need more change, run to the diner and ask for Al. The flowers are sold as they are bunched, for three dollars a bunch. OK?"

"Sounds fine, Jack." Harry settled onto the stool next to a bunch of pink, waxy looking flowers. "You go on. Hope the wife does all right."

Jack took two bunches of white flowers from their container and wrapped them in green waxed paper.

"She'll do fine," Jack said, but he didn't smile. He carried the white flowers across the street to the hospital.

Harry crossed his legs and lit a cigarette. With his elbow on the cart he watched the smoke curl into the pink morning sky.

"Beautiful iris," a man in a three piece, dark suit was saying to Harry.

"Iris?" Harry looked at the man.

He set his briefcase on the sidewalk and lifted a bunch of the tall, purple flowers out of their container.

"I'd like these." He handed the dripping flowers to Harry who wrapped them in the green paper while his cigarette dangled from his lips and the smoke drifted into his eyes.

The man smiled broadly as he handed Harry three dollars and took his flowers.

Harry sat down and crossed his legs. "Iris." He said to

himself, tugging at his right ear lobe. "Sounds like a better name for a woman than a flower."

A young boy, about eight years old, rode his bike up to the cart.

"What are you doing out so early young man?" Harry asked, as he took another cigarette from his shirt pocket.

The boy jumped off the bike and left it on the sidewalk.

"I would like some flowers. I met a girl in the park yesterday. She said she'd be back today."

"Girl, huh? Was she pretty?"

The boy smiled shyly.

"If you want her to notice you, you got to charm her, boy. You can give her flowers if you want, but you ought to smoothe her, you know, show her how smart you are, things like that."

"I'd really just like to give her some flowers. Could I get some of these pink ones?"

"You can get anything you want, long as you got three dollars." Harry took a last puff from his cigarette and ground it under his brown boot.

The boy reached into the pocket of his blue shorts and showed Harry a handful of change. "This is what I have."

He spread the money on the sidewalk next to his bike, a tuft of brown hair fell across his forehead.

"You got less than a dollar there, boy. Sorry, no dice. These flowers are three dollars a bunch." Harry crossed his legs and leaned his weight forward, resting his elbows on his brown pants.

The boy picked up the change in his small hand and put it back in his pocket. He looked at the pink flowers once before he turned his bike and rode away.

"Kids," Harry said. Watching the boy leave, he became aware of a low humming. A woman, old and round, dressed in rumpled clothes, carrying a shopping bag, was looking at the flowers while she hummed. It was a noise, not a song of any kind. Her thin hair poked out at odd angles from her head. Her

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face made wild movements not connected to the rest of her.

Harry thought to himself, "Why in the world have I got to deal with this ancient bat?" She spoke and the words formed out of the wild motions of her jaw. Harry watched, squinting and looking hard at her.

"The iris are handsome. But I think the snapdragon are the best you have today." She pulled two bunches of the pink flowers out of the water and handed them to Harry, her jaw still working even though her voice was still. As Harry wrapped the flowers he felt her thin, pale eyes on him.

"You like these huh? Snapdragon? Little kid was just here wanting to buy some. He didn't have enough money though." Harry looked at the woman.

The woman stuck her gray hand deep into her shopping bag and pulled out six dollars and handed it to Harry. He gave her the flowers and she began the humming again. She clutched her snapdragon and shuffled off in the direction she came.

"I suppose she's going to decorate her park bench," Harry grunted and pulled another cigarette from his pocket as he sat down.

"Snapdragon," he thought. "Who names these things?" The waxy flowers didn't look like any kind of dragon. "Snapdragon. Beats me."

Harry looked across the street and saw the boy straddling his bike. He had seen the woman buy the flowers he wanted. Harry puffed on a cigarette and looked down the street in the other direction. He saw another bike approaching the cart, but this was one of those fast type bikes - not much to them. The fellow riding it had on tight, black shorts, a shirt splattered with sixteen different colors, and an eggshell helmet perched on his head. He braked in front of the cart.

"Good morning," the biker said.

"Morning."

"How about a bunch of those daisies?" He reached behind, into a pocket on the back of his shirt, and produced

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three dollars.

"Daisies?" Harry looked over all the flowers trying to decide which one would be a daisy. There were lots of songs about daisies, how did they go?

"Right there, the white ones. You new at this?"

"Yeah, just filling in." Harry wrapped the 'daisies' and the bike rider put them in the pocket in the back of his shirt.

"Have fun then," the biker called out as he wheeled away, the daisies gushing white across his back.

Harry looked across the street and the boy was gone.

"Sir?" said the boy.

He was behind Harry.

"Could you maybe sell me a dollars worth of flowers?"

"No kid, the flowers are three dollars a bunch, that's it."

Harry put the cash box away and sat down on his stool. The boy hung his head and walked away, pushing his bike.

"Why don't you get a job?" Harry called out after him.

Harry sat still now, no one stopped for flowers. He looked at the flowers at his feet and wondered what would become of the flowers he'd sold. The biker, with the flowers stuck in his pocket, he might have a nice apartment to put them in, or a girlfriend to give them to. Seems like he could get a lot more for his three dollars though.

And the old woman. Harry doubted she even had a house. Maybe she puts them on the table down at the soup kitchen, or maybe she stuffs them in her bag with everything else she has in there. It beat Harry.

And the guy in the suit. He must've bought them to impress someone. He obviously could afford the three dollars, but the old woman, why did she spend six dollars, what was she gonna do with all those flowers?

Harry stared at the snapdragon. They had pink, bold, upright heads, sticking up from dark green stems. He thought of the woman's gray hand and her humming. He thought of the pink flowers clutched in her hand. Taking them, where? Wherever she took them they would still be bright and bold,

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insinuating their pink on everything around them. Harry reached for a bunch of snapdragon. Amazing how they grew into such even shapes, each one like the other. And put together in bunches their color becomes loud.

Harry turned the bunch over in his hand, he studied the dark green stems. He put the flowers to his nose, but couldn't smell anything. Amazing that they could be so strong in shape and color but not have any smell. Harry had thought all flowers smelled. Harry looked up from trying to smell the bunch of snapdragon to see the boy on his bike at the edge of the cart.

Harry slowly extended the hand with flowers.

"Here son, take these to your girl."

"Wow! Thank you, sir." Smiling, the boy clutched the pink flowers between his hand and the handlebars and rode away.

Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out three dollars. He put it in the cashbox and sat down on the stool, smiling and humming to himself.

*Bonnie Hanks*

## **I Hate People**

I hate people.

I thought about that as I picked at the fire, pushing in a small chunk of wood that had been trying to escape the flames.

Where's that banana? Oh, there it is.

Peeling away the yellow, I sat back on the sand and watched the smoke dance, the plumes climbing into the empty blue sky. Then I gazed out into the quiet surf as the waves licked at the beach.

God, I hate people.

I just couldn't stand them anymore. Had to get away. That's why I'm here. It has always amazed me that the human race can consider itself the most intelligent species on this planet, with as many boneheads as there are running around. People are such idiots.

But not me. I'm smart. Smarter than most people. I realize what's important in life and don't waste my time on foolishness. That's how I got where I am today, through hard work and dedication. I have been with the Company now for going on ten years, made junior vice-president in eight.

Unlike those other idiots at the Company. All they want to do is yak, yak, yak. So who cares if Fred Marten went fishing with some of his loser friends over the weekend. They packed up and headed for the lake Friday afternoon. Probably left work early, too. I'll have to watch him. He and his friends spent the whole time telling stories, drinking beer and trying to fool fish into biting a hook disguised as a bug. Yeah, and that's why he's still a junior exec.

And Mike Border, he'll never amount to much. Spends Saturday night at a party, drinking so much that he suffers a hang-over the next day. I spent my Saturday pouring over fiscal sheets. We see who's more productive, don't we?

I hear what they talk about. Sometimes, when I'm passing the breakroom, I'll stop to listen, just outside the door where they can't see me. The dinner parties, the dates, the

weekend outings. Sometimes, if I'm not too busy, I'll stand there and listen to these silly people.

I hate people.

I listen to the palm tree leaves rustle in the breeze. Still, the sky is clear, not even a cloud. The sun is warm. I'm sure to tan well while I'm here. Starting to feel a bit tired, I lay my head back on the soft white sand.

I was always a hard worker. It's important to work hard if you want to get ahead in the business. I had goals and staying a junior exec was not one of them. And it paid off. The Old Man really liked my work. You would never catch me leaving early because of a "hot date," or dragging ass on a Monday because of a rough weekend. No sir. I know what's important. And now I make 100 thousand a year.

There are trade-offs, of course. I may not be able to do all the things I would like to at the moment, but those are minor losses. Let the lesser people have their frivolous activities. They never invited me to any of their parties or after work get-togethers. Nobody ever asked me if I wanted to play on the Company bowling team or the softball team. It's just as well, because I'm usually too busy anyway. I have too much to do and they are all too stupid for me to deal with.

They don't exclude me, I exclude them.

I shaded my eyes and looked up at the brightly plumaged bird fretting in the tree high above. It seemed to notice me and took off, flying down the deserted stretch of beach. I looked again to the horizon, which was unblemished.

Stupid people.

I've never needed anyone. I have always gotten along alone just fine, thank you. And that goes for Cathy, too.

We met, both dining alone. I was still an entry-level executive at the Company, but well on my way to the top, and she a university law student. She seemed impressed with me and, I must admit, I was impressed with her. We really hit it off right from the start.

God, she was pretty. Blue eyes and light red hair

**Aldebaran 74**

framing her face. And smart, too; an unusual quality in women, I have noticed. We would go for walks in the park, or to the theater; she loved the theater. And talk. I loved to talk to her, just to hear her voice. So smooth and melodic.

But soon, she turned out like all other women. She constantly complained that I was spending too much time at work and not enough with her. Couldn't she understand that what I was doing was important, that I was doing this for us, our future? I was sorry I had to cancel our weekend plans again, but the Davis account was almost ready and if I worked through the weekend, I could have it submitted a whole two weeks early. That was worth big points with the Old Man.

I remember her eyes, those blues eyes. So sad, so full of disappointment. I just couldn't make her see, couldn't make her understand. I knew she was upset, but I really thought she would come around.

I really miss her.

I rummaged around in the pack and found the last candy bar. The chocolate was old and dry, but it was edible. I sat back down, eating half of the candy, rewrapping the remainder.

Women take up too much time and I can't see where they are worth it. Of course, it's not just women, but people in general that take up too much time. But then, people in general are a pain in the ass, aren't they?

Old people are the worst. Put them all away somewhere so they don't disturb the productive members of society. Why should I have to deal with them? All I needed was a bottle of mouthwash, toothpaste and some Dramamine, but I had to stand in line as some blue-hair counted out pennies and food stamps. Sometimes I think they do that just to annoy me.

I hate people.

This vacation was the Old Man's idea. He said I was getting too tense. I tried to explain that it was just exasperation at all the idiots I had to put up with everyday, but he insisted.

**Aldebaran 75**

I had never taken a vacation before. All the ones Cathy and I planned got cancelled, for one reason or another.

The little putz at the travel agency said he had just the thing for me. "Hawaii," he said. Not just the regular tourist package, but a smaller resort on one of the less populated islands. It had everything the Hyatt had, he said, but fewer people.

The resort was nice, everything that little clod promised. Quiet and out of the mainstream, not crowded. And two whole weeks to enjoy it. I had to admit, the Old Man was right. I needed this.

There was a small airport nearby with island-hopping services operating from it. They would fly the paying tourists around the islands, to go shopping or just sight-seeing. That sounded real good to me.

It was a small plane, though not as small as I expected. One of those twin-engine commuter jobs. Pilot, co-pilot, one stewardess/guide and six passengers. None of the passengers struck me as particularly interesting, aside from one young woman sitting across the aisle from me. She was a fair young thing, long reddish hair, sparkling blue eyes, holding a child not more than a year old.

The baby cooed and gigled playing with whatever that thing is that babies put in their mouths, its eyes as bright as its mother's. The other passengers paid little attention, but I was fascinated as I watched the mother and child play, grabbing at each other's fingers. Watching this gave me a feeling of having forgotten something, though I couldn't imagine what it might have been.

The pilot took us over the main islands where I got a good look at the volcanoes and Diamond Head and everything else you're supposed to see when you come to Hawaii. I would have enjoyed it more, however, if I didn't have to listen to the screechy-voiced woman behind me point out every little detail to her husband. He should have left her at home.

Then, we turned out towards the smaller, uninhabited

islands. Sights mainlanders seldom see. Beautiful green pearls set in shimmering blue tapestry. I could imagine the ancient Polynesian seafarers rowing their little canoes between those miniature land masses.

And no people.

What happened next, I'm not sure and probably never will be. There was a sputter, like a car starting on a cold morning, and then a loud bang. The plane lurched to one side and I looked out the window. All I could see was blue sparkles.

There was a lot of yelling and things falling from the overheads. The pilot was trying to say something over the intercom, but those idiots were making too much noise, I couldn't understand what he was saying. Then my head was thrust down to my knees as the plane suddenly stopped.

Now things are a blur. I heard some moaning and screaming, but I wasn't sure if the sounds came from machine or man. My legs were wet and I could smell brine. I found myself at the forward door. I don't remember how, but the door opened and I was squinting against the glare and blue sparkles. Yellow hissed and blossomed as the raft inflated in front of me and next I was in that raft, moving away from the disappearing twin engine aircraft. The only thing I remember clearly was the figure in the doorway, clutching the limp infant in her arms. But soon the foam swallowed them as well.

I don't think I was in the water long before I reached the island, which was little more than a sandbar with trees. I beached the raft, a rock punching a hole in it as I did, and walked up the sand with the little pack of survival supplies I found in the raft; two flares, a box of waterproof matches, three candy bars and a fishing kit. The matches went to work on some driftwood and soon a fire was drying my clothes. I ate one of the candy bars as I read the flare instructions, which I knew would soon be used when the rescue planes showed up.

Anytime. Anytime now they should be looking for that twin engine aircraft and limp infant.

**Aldebaran 77**

I sat up with a start and strained my eyes towards the horizon, but the glint I thought I saw refused to reappear.

It's been three days now. I looked at the fishing kit I had no idea how to use. I wish I had gone with Fred Marten on one of his fishing trips. I'm getting tired of bananas and coconuts. I've walked around this stupid island a hundred times. All I've found were seagulls screeching at me. I keep the fire going all the time; there's plenty of wood.

Where are the rescuers? Where are the simple-minded masses that have annoyed me every day for thirty-six years? Are you telling me that I have found the one spot on this miserable planet where they can't find me?

Don't leave me here. Come get me, you cretins!  
I hate people.

*David W. Decherd*

## Ten

Alan's car idles by the curb, and he stares at the house across the street. Little has changed. The clapboard siding needs paint, the picket fence encloses a yard full of weeds, and a gate hangs by one hinge, as it all did twenty-five years ago, when he was ten.

\* \* \*

They owed for three weeks, and Alan got anxious when anyone went past two. He knocked on the door again, harder this time. His friend Bill waited outside the fence on his bike.

Alan was about to leave, when a hand parted the lace curtains and a face peered from the darkened house. After a pause, he heard the lock being unbolted, and the door was pulled open.

"What is it?" the man asked, shielding his eyes from the summer sun. Alan had never seen this man before. He needed a shave and his overalls were rumpled.

"I deliver your paper, Mr. Porter. I'm here to collect. You owe for three weeks. Ninety cents." Alan sounded apologetic, as if it was his fault the bill had gotten so high. The man didn't answer. He just gripped the edge of the door unsteadily and studied him with confused eyes. "I usually collect from your wife," Alan explained further. The man's silence made him nervous.

"Don't have a wife," he slurred. "It's my sister. She's in the hospital."

"Oh. I'm sorry," Alan said. "I hope she'll be all right. Would it be possible to collect from you?" He wondered if it might be impolite to ask, since the man's sister was sick. He had only spoken to her a few times. She started the paper a month ago, shortly after moving into the house, and Alan had only been able to collect once. He had seen furniture being moved into the house, from an old pickup truck, and stopped to see if the new people wanted the paper. He was excited about selling the subscription; before this, the house had been empty.



The man eyed the boy, and stood back from the door.  
"Come in," he said at last.

Alan glanced back at Bill out on the sidewalk, then stepped across the threshold into the dark, cluttered living room. A black and white television flickered in the corner, and magazines were scattered everywhere. Hanging crookedly, on the wall in front of him, was a large painting of a clown juggling oranges.

Porter shifted over to a doily-covered sofa and fell into it. An almost-empty bottle of whiskey sat open on the coffee table in front of him, and several unopened newspapers, newspapers no one had paid for, were stacked on the floor near his feet. "Come over. Sit down," Porter said, patting the cushion beside him.

Alan went over, hesitantly, and sat down on the edge of the sofa. "Will you be able to pay me for the paper?" he asked. "It's for three weeks now."

"How much is it?" The man stretched to retrieve his glass.

"Ninety cents. Thirty cents a week. Mrs. Porter - your sister - owes me for three weeks," Alan repeated.

The man took a long, slow drink from his glass, emptying it. Then replacing the glass, he looked at Alan for a moment. "I'll give you ten dollars."

"I don't have change for ten dollars. I'm sorry. Don't you have anything smaller? I have change for a five."

Porter seemed puzzled and was silent for a moment. Then, with effort, he sat forward, took the bottle of whiskey by the neck, and shakily refilled his glass. "No," he said. "I'll give you ten dollars."

"You don't have to give me ten dollars," Allan insisted. "See, it's just for three weeks. Ninety cents." He opened his collection book to the proper page and pointed to the balance. "See. Ninety cents."

"I'll give you ten dollars," Porter said again, nodding his head. Alan could smell the whiskey and cigarettes on his

breath.

"I can't take ten dollars from you when you only owe ninety cents. Don't you see? It wouldn't be right. Why don't you give me a dollar? That would give me a ten cent tip." Alan thought the man must be so drunk he didn't know what he was saying. He didn't have much experience with people who drank - no one in his family drank. He'd seen men drinking at the tavern on the corner, and some of them were drunk sometimes. Bill's father, Mr. Zimmerman, was drunk after Bill's sister's wedding, but he hadn't ever actually talked to a drunk man before.

Porter put his hand on Alan's leg, just above where the knee was ripped out of his jeans. "You have a nice leg," he said.

"Maybe I should collect some other time - "

"We can go in there in the bedroom," the man said, ignoring him. "It will only take a few minutes. . . You don't have to do anything, just lay there. How about it? I'll give you ten dollars - "

"No. I've got to go. My friend's waiting for me." Alan got to his feet, and started for the door. The room was too hot, and the air was stale. He couldn't really picture what the man wanted to do, but he had heard the older guys with paper routes talking about certain things.

The door had locked when it was closed, and Alan smelled the musty curtains as he tried unsuccessfully to pull it open. He turned the lock clockwise, then counterclockwise, tugging each time on the doorknob. His cheeks were hot, and the hair stood up on his neck. He jammed his collection book under his arm to free his hands. Through the lacy curtains, patterned like paper snowflakes, he could see Bill still waiting on his bike. There, in the fresh air, Alan's bicycle and safety waited as well. With his left hand, he turned the lock counterclockwise again. At the same time, he turned the knob to the right and jerked. The door refused to budge. Alan was aware of Porter still slumped on the sofa, then, through the

corner of his eye, he saw him push himself up out of the couch. Breathing hard, Alan struggled with the door, pulling once, twice, three times. It was like one of his nightmares where he was being chased, but couldn't get his legs to move. Porter was behind him now, the smell of whiskey and cigarettes was stronger. There was something about the man's eyes that reminded him of a stray animal - like he was having a hard time just existing. Porter put his hand on top of Alan's.

Together they had freed the door. Alan never passed the paper at the house anymore, and he never collected his ninety cents. He only saw Porter one time after that - he was sitting at the bar in the corner tavern where Alan also delivered the paper. But the man didn't see him, or if he did, he didn't let on. When Alan thought about that time in Porter's living room, especially when he was older, he felt more pity for him than he did anger. After a few months the house was empty again, and different people moved in, but Alan never did get around to asking if they wanted the paper.

\* \* \*

"Dad," the boy says. "Was this the last part of your paper route?"

"No Tom. This was the middle - the halfway point. I'll show you the rest."

"Did you pass Grandmother's paper too?"

"I sure did. It was the last house on my route."

"I'd like to have a paper route. Do you think I could have a paper route someday, Dad?"

"Maybe. We'll see," he says putting his hand on the boy's shaggy head. "We'll see," he says smiling.

"When? When can I have a paper route?"

"When you're older."

"How old? I'm already ten."

Alan studies his son seated beside him in the car. The boy reminds Alan's mother so much of him at that age, she says. He has his sense of humor, his intensity, his kindness, and, yes, his innocence. These things, she said this morning,

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remind her so much of Alan when he was ten.

*Ronald Alexander*

## **Blues**

"For Christ's sake, Prewett, why don't you get some sun?" the bartender asked. "You're white as chalk."

Carl Bennett watched Joel Prewett half stumble, half shuffle along the bar, sliding a mug of beer on the counter.

"Sun's bad for you," he slurred. "Gives you skin cancer."

He hefted the beer with what seemed considerable effort and collapsed in a chair opposite Carl.

Carl was thrilled to be in a real barroom close to his new hero Joel Prewett. The closest thing to a bar his small town had was a corner by the general store where the young men gathered to drink beer and smoke. Now he was in a big city barroom that had a polished mahogany bar and big glass mirrors on the wall.

Carl wasn't accustomed to seeing Joel Prewett this way, though. He was used to seeing Joel up on stage like a prince, playing the blues on his guitar. Joel played at a place down the street from the barroom called the Jasmine Club. He did two shows a night Wednesday through Sunday. Carl would sit in the audience sipping draft beer and see Joel lit up in the spotlight and webs of blue smoke, wearing a white coat and black bow tie as he played the bluesy melodies that brought people to the Jasmine Club.

"So, kid," Joel Prewett said, breathing on him, "isn't this the life?"

Carl didn't answer. This was his first really closeup look at Joel Prewett. Prewett looked older than he did on stage. His black hair was receding and the scalp looked as though it had been stitched and then stretched taut. His skin was puffy like bread dough and his eyes seemed unfocused, like a muddy

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brown swirl.

"I wanted to learn to play like you," Carl said.

Prewett pulled a battered silver cigarette case from the pocket of his long-sleeved shirt and shook loose a cigarette. He offered one to Carl, but Carl didn't smoke. Prewett jabbed the cigarette in his mouth and lit up. Smoke curled up and around his white face and circled around his tobacco-stained fingers.

"Takes a while," Prewett explained, "for me to get going in the morning."

Prewett slapped the cigarette case closed. Haltingly, he put the case back into the pocket of his shirt. Carl was surprised at the almost palsy-like jiggling of Prewett's hands.

His eyes seemed to come into focus and he leaned more upright in his chair, staring at Carl through the haze of smoke. He stubbed the cigarette out in an ash tray and took a deep, thoughtful swig from the beer mug.

"Now," Prewett gave a thin-lipped smile, "I'm ready for some coffee. How about you kid?"

"Sure," said Carl.

"There's a place close by," Prewett stood and swayed for a moment. "See you, Eddie," he called to the bartender.

They went outside into the bright glare of the early morning. Prewett walked with his head bent low, shoulders raised up close to his neck, walking in quick, choppy steps. Carl raced to keep up. A gust of wind carried the scent of Prewett's shaving lotion, a sweet oily smell that reminded Carl of barbershops.

Prewett came to a sidewalk cafe and stopped and sat at a table.

When Carl sat across from him Prewett said, "They know me here. They'll be along in a minute."

A waitress brought Prewett's black coffee and a roll and butter and took Carl's order.

The sidewalks were getting crowded now, with clumps of people stopping in at the gift shops and small restaurants.

Carl liked the Saturday morning smell of fresh-cut flowers and frying chicken and fish.

Prewett was quiet as he buttered his roll and devoured it. He licked the crumbs from his fingers and held the coffee cup in hands that seemed steady now. He watched Carl.

Carl felt uncomfortable under Prewett's stare. He shifted in his chair and tried to interest himself in the people passing by.

"Don't like to be stared at, kid?" Prewett said. "Better get used to it if you want to play professionally. When you're up there on the stage you can feel people's eyes boring into you. How about it, kid?"

"I can handle it," Carl said. "I've played in front of people."

"But did they ever treat you like a freak?" Prewett demanded.

"No," Carl stammered.

"That's how they make me feel," Prewett said. "Like a damned freak."

Carl didn't know what to say. Prewett on stage appeared to have total mastery over his audience. There was no hint of fear or pain, only those marvelously gifted hands bringing a guitar to life.

"I didn't mean," Carl began, "I didn't mean to bother you."

Prewett was quiet.

"It's just that you play so great. You're really great."

Prewett was quiet, watching Carl, and Carl felt the sun beating on his face. Perspiration was streaming down his face and the sun gleamed off the white table top.

"It's damned hot," Prewett said at last. "Let's get on down to the club."

Prewett pulled out his wallet and threw some dollar bills on the table and began threading his way through the people on the sidewalk. Carl pushed his way through, seeing Prewett's gaunt figure up ahead.

Prewett was waiting for him at the stage door of the Jasmine Club. Without saying anything, he took a key and opened the door. He held the door while Carl walked inside.

It was dark inside and Carl waited for his eyes to adjust. He was in the backstage area and the place looked like partially-completed construction. Skeletal support beams crisscrossed the walls, bridged by occasional remnants of white spider webs.

"This way," Prewett gestured.

They walked down a narrow hallway. Swirls of dust spun away from their feet. The lighting came from a bare bulb suspended on a cord. They passed a restroom that had the door missing. A tattered shower curtain provided some privacy. Prewett led him to a room in the corner.

Prewett went inside and Carl heard the click of a switch. A fluorescent tube that was darkening at both ends flickered on and threw out a pale light. The room, apparently Prewett's dressing room, had a metal chair and a vanity table and mirror beneath the fluorescent light.

A metal rack held Prewett's stage costumes, an array of white and black and blue suits on hangers. Candy wrappers and styrofoam fast food containers littered the vanity table. There wasn't a window and Carl felt claustrophobic.

"Sorry about the mess," Prewett said.

There were framed pictures on the wall. They showed a younger Prewett with various bands he had played with. There were framed copies of records Prewett had helped record.

Prewett plopped in the metal chair and stared vacantly at Carl.

"This is the bottom of the pit," he told Carl. "This is where you wind up."

"Is it that bad?"

Prewett's face was hidden by shadow.

Prewett reached under the table and pulled out a guitar case. He pulled out the black guitar Carl recognized from his

stage performances and began tuning the guitar. There was a rap at the door and Carl saw a man's shadowy figure.

"Hey, Prewett, got a minute?"

Prewett stood the guitar by the table and looked up.

"Excuse me, kid. Got some business."

Carl heard muffled conversation outside the door and Prewett came back carrying a bag. He folded the top of the bag over neatly and put the bag into a corner of his guitar case.

"Let's go outside," Prewett said. "I'll plug the guitar into the club sound system."

Prewett took the guitar, leaving the case behind, and went out front to the stage. A cleaning woman was wiping off tables out front with a damp rag and she waved to Prewett.

"I rehearse every day," Prewett said. "Even on days I don't play. You play everyday, kid?"

"No," Carl said.

Prewett busied himself plugging the guitar into an amplifier. He went down a row of switches, flicking them on.

He sat on a stool, all business now, and finished tuning the guitar.

Bent over the guitar he said, "You wanted to know how I learned to play. The blues I play are really just the story of my life. I keep adding stuff. Like I have the 'Carl Bennett Blues,'" and he picked out a fast tempo song Carl hadn't heard before.

"Like it, kid?"

"Yeah," Carl said with enthusiasm.

"It needs work," Prewett said. "You've always got to keep reaching, kid. Let me play the older stuff."

He began playing the melodies Carl had tried hard to imitate. Prewett could shift abruptly from sad, slow melodies to melodies that soared so high they seemed angelic. Carl watched Prewett's fingers dance on the guitar strings like the soaring of birds' wings.

"That all comes from my life," Prewett said. "I grew up in the Mississippi delta country. It was quiet and slow and hot.

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Lots of folks lived in tarpaper shacks and the cotton gleamed in the hot afternoon sun. We went down to the creek and went swimming to keep cool. When the full moon came up, kid, it seemed to swim on the steamy heat from the delta.

"There were the revival meetings at the church. You ever go to a revival? The preachers would scream about hellfire and pound their fists on the lectern and then they would call for people to give their lives to Christ. The whole congregation would sing and it seemed sweeter than any music in the world.

"There was Sunday dinner. We ate grits and beans and cornbread during the week. But on Sunday we would get fried chicken and mashed potatoes and iced tea. Sometimes when the preacher came we got pork chops.

"I remember old cars, kid. It seemed like everyone had old cars that always needed lots of fixing up. Nobody ever had any money, but somehow we kept the old cars running.

"When I was eighteen I met some guys from Memphis. They had a good car. They probably stole it; I don't know. I took a ride with them and they robbed a gas station. They used a sawed off shotgun and shot the attendant in the face.

"I went to prison, kid, and spent a year on a chain gang, and I didn't have nothing to do with it.

"That's my story, kid. But when you heard the music you knew it all along, didn't you?"

Prewett slumped over, as though exhausted by the effort of relating his life. He put the guitar on the floor.

"I got something to do."

Prewett walked back to his dressing room. Carl suddenly felt ashamed, like someone who accidentally walks in on someone naked. He wanted to tell Prewett goodbye.

At the door of the dressing room he saw Prewett peeling off his shirt and Prewett's thin, white body shined like a dead fish in the light. He saw the tracings of needle marks on Prewett's arms and Prewett reaching into his guitar case.

Carl went back to the stage and moments later Prewett

**Aldebaran 88**

returned wearing a fresh shirt.

"Thanks for stopping by, kid. I hope I helped."

"You did," Carl said and shook Prewett's hand.

Carl went outside into the bright sun and past the marquee with Prewett's name on it. He wanted to think something profound, but there was only a hollowness inside him. He was beginning to understand the blues.

*Jerry Goodwin*

## The Insomniac

There hasn't been a day in the last ten years that I haven't thought of him. Not just during the time we were married, but afterwards, too. Sometimes a typical romantic musing: the curve of his shoulder, the way his chest felt, what it was like to touch him. Other times I think about a toast he made once, at a party. His handwriting, not scrawling like most men's, but beautiful, black and looping across a page.

Sometimes I've felt compelled to say his name. I've been at work downtown, or out at some bar with my friends and I've gone into the restroom, closed the stall door, just to say his name once, out loud.

The time I think of him most, though, is late at night.

I've always had problems sleeping, this is nothing new. The insomnia was even worse when I never saw him. Now that we actually see each other every week or so, whenever he sees fit to squeeze me into his schedule, I sleep a little better.

But the insomnia is still there.

I've tried everything. A glass of milk before bed: cold milk, warm milk in a little saucepan. Red wine, mulled wine. Buttered toast. A good book. A short run. Calisthenics. Actually, I think it's gotten better. These days I can get to sleep, usually pretty easily. It's just that I wake up every night by 2:00 or 3:00.

That early in the morning I could almost lose myself, could almost float off from my body and nothing would happen, could float in circles like an orange plastic fish in a baby's clear plastic teething ring.

Late at night is the time I think about him most. In my mind we are lying on a huge rock, a table of stone, out in the bright sunlight, my back against the rock, a caterpillar crawling across my ankle, doves mating, their wings singing as they move toward earth. I can think of nothing but him, *fingers, tongue, hips, arms*.

One time I made a list of twenty-nine reasons to let

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him go. First and foremost on the list was the idea that I get nothing from him but sex. This is a lie; the list started with a lie.

So I made a list of reasons to see him. There were eighteen. First and foremost was what it feels like to make love with him. (Here I will not call it sex.)

Fortunately or unfortunately, depending upon how you see it, sex is not all.

There are also all the words, most of them unsaid. Occasionally late at night I write him letters. It's easy for me to fill up a page or two with all the things I'm never able to actually say. The problem is, when I see him, I actually say very little that's significant. I turn to liquid, nothing but wanting him. Afterwards, I always want to say something.

I've made a list of things to ask him, but how can I ask him anything? On the phone we talk about nothing but making love. When I see him we do nothing but make love. He never says what he feels. He's a mystery to me. One minute I'll know that he still loves me and the next minute he may turn a certain way, or the inflection in his voice may change, and he becomes a stranger.

I don't know what's going on inside his head. I imagine his brain like a tiny world, a minaturist's masterpiece. I never really know what happens there; I can only guess.

Sometimes late at night I listen to old records. In a dramatic mood it may be Billie Holiday, singing with a magnolia blossom in her hair, mourning what she never knew. It may be an album of the early Beatles, all energy, practically bursting from the speakers.

I try to read. Late at night I can't seem to pay attention to serious writing. Mysteries make me get out of bed to check the closets, double-lock the doors. Cookbooks make good bedfellows, but they also make me hungry.

Sometimes late at night I bake banana fritters with a confectioner's sugar glaze, blueberry muffins, chocolate crumb cake.

Sometimes I watch television. Late night news for the latest on world military leaders, pop culture updates. Old reruns of *Topper* or *The Fugitive*, B-grade movies on VHF channels. The home shopping network, diamond tennis bracelets and smokeless ashtrays. A versatile wardrobe of man-made purses in graduated sizes.

I've thumbed through my toll-free phone book, called and left messages in the middle of the night, ordered lingerie catalogs and information on trips to Port-au-Prince.

I've stared at the sky for a while, seen the moon like a flat white stone skimmed out into a dark river, a river thick with stars.

I've shed my clothes and danced naked in front of a full-length mirror. I've wanted to light candles, dance under the waning moon.

I've thumbed through the encyclopedia, my childhood World Book, that's always comforting. I've decided which breed of dog I like the most. I've read about the natural wonders of the Pacific Northwest, found out about geisha girls, Abraham Lincoln, marzipan. The possibilities are endless.

Lately I've rediscovered time zones. When it's 3:00 a.m. in Atlanta, it's also 3:00 a.m. in Fort Meyers, Florida (out on the beach, hunting for shells in the moonlight), 3:00 a.m. in New York (standing on the balcony of a hotel off Central Park, listening to a reggae band that's playing somewhere out in the street), 3:00 a.m. in Bangor, Maine (water moving in the distance). It's 2:00 a.m. in New Orleans (a brass band on Bourbon Street, an old prostitute leaning against the door to a cheap strip joint), 2:00 a.m. at Gilley's Bar in Texas, 2:00 a.m. in Duluth, Minnesota (a family of four sleeping in a split-level house, a white Persian cat sleeping on the daughter's bed). 1:00 a.m. in Denver (moonlight falling heady on the picture post-card Rockies), 12:00 a.m. in Las Vegas (the Sands and the Taj Mahal glowing neon, the slot machines inside still whirring furiously). 12:00 a.m. in Los Angeles (coming home from a movie, wearing sandals, the night unseasonably warm). Across

the ocean it is another day. Another day in London, off a fjord in Norway, in Latvia, in Botswana, Hong Kong, the Australian Outback.

Every night when I lie here sleepless, there is a whole world of people awake and laughing, maybe working in an air conditioned office or rolling up their shirt sleeves out in a field somewhere. Putting on a string of pearls. Arranging a big bowl of tulips. Polishing their fingernails. Making love. Changing tires. Baking bread.

Why can I only think of him, sleeping somewhere across town, the same town, curled like a seashell in a bed of white cotton sheets, the curtains drawn so there is no light, not even moonlight, maybe not dreaming at all, or dreaming of me?

*Trish Rucker*

### **Author's Notes**

**Bernell MacDonald** has published 5 books to date. He publishes regularly in magazines and anthologies both in Canada and the United States.

**Dawn A. Hightower** is a new writer from the Midwest. She writes poetry, short fiction, plays, and essays. Her work has appeared in: Valley Women's Voices, Kalliope, and Writer's Journal.

**Dick Huguley** writes poetry and currently resides in Carrollton, Georgia.

**Mahdy Y. Khaiyat** currently works for the Los Angeles Times. He is a graduate of the Univ. of California, Santa Barbara, and began writing poetry for publication in 1989. Some of his poems have appeared in: Colorado-North Review, Long Islander, and Skylark.

**Charles Bigelow** writes poetry and currently resides in West Milford, New Jersey.

**Ian Randall Wilson** is a former television writer and development executive who now writes fiction and poetry. He has published 4 collections of poetry, and some of his work has appeared in: ONTHEBUS, The Boston Literary Review, and The North American Review.

**Genevieve Stephens** has a B.A. and an M.A. from Central Michigan University. Resides in Florida during the winter, painting and collecting things. Resides in Michigan during the summer, welding non-objective pieces for a sculpture garden.

**Mark Gafur** currently attends Roger Williams College. He is a sophomore, pursuing a Psychology major, and likes to write in his spare time.

**Fr. Benedict Auer, O.S.B.** is a Benedictine monk of St. Martin's Abbey in Lacey, Washington. He is presently Director of Campus Ministry at St. Martin's College where he teaches. Some of his poems have appeared in: Manhattan Poetry Review, Red Cedar Review, and Kansas Quarterly.

**Walter Kuchinsky** lives and writes in Franklin, MA. Some of his poems have appeared in: Reflect, Phoebe, and Red Cedar Review.

**Mary Rudbeck Stanko** lives and writes in southeastern Ontario, where she manages a European-style cut-flower business, and works as a landscaper, home renovator, and a clown. Her poetry has been published internationally in literary journals such as: Commonweal, Pacific Review, and Sun Dog.

**B. Z. Niditch** lives and writes in Milton, MA. Some of his work has appeared in: Folio, Amherst Review, and Cover: New York.

**Kelly A. Babson** was first published seventeen years ago at the age of 14. She has continued to write during this time, and has had work appear in magazines such as: Thirteen, Old Hickory Review, and Manna.

**Joan Payne Kincaid** paints and has exhibited widely on Long Island and in New York City. She writes and is published internationally. She's breaking in a new siamese kitten called "Cleopatra" who writes poetry and shares her tea.



**Ross Morrison** lives and writes in Greenville, South Carolina.

**Michael K. White** is a nervous, social recluse who lives with his wife Lori and their two cats in Greeley, Colorado. He has published the novel The Somnambulist, co-written and produced 17 plays, and has published in: American Literary Review, Muse, and Night Roses.

**Robert Friedman** is an Architect by profession, who turns to poetry and wheel thrown ceramics whenever he feels the need for a more immediate sense of creative expression. He has just recently begun to circulate his poetry.

**April Selley** is an Assoicate Professor of English at The College of Saint Rose. Last year she was a Fullbright lecturer in American Literature in Portugal.

**Christopher Lee Nichols** works in Data Processing with Iron Mountain Forge Corporation. Some of his past activities have included attending Westminster College and Mineral Area College, as well as joining the Navy. He lives and writes in Farmington, MO.

**Walter McDonald** is currently the Paul Whitfield Horn Professor of English and Poet in Residence at Texas Tech University. His latest books of poetry are: Night Landings, After the Noise of Saigon, and The Flying Dutchman.

**Sister Clarita Felhoelter** is a Louisville native, a Catholic Ursuline sister, and a former teacher. She retired in 1987 and currently tutors and works on her poetry.

**Leigh Kirkland** won the 1989-90 GSU Review Fiction Award. Her poetry has appeared in: Hayden's Ferry Review, Zone 3, and New Virginia Quarterly.

**John E. Poch** is a student at Georgia State University and has started a literary movement called Epiphany. He has had poetry recently appear in Snake Nation Review, and is associate editor of The Chattahoochee Review.

**Robert Loudin** was winner of the A.P.A. Poet of Merit 1989 Award and 1989 Golden Poet Award. He recently published a book of poetry entitled Caged Emotions.

**Ronald Alexander** has been published in The Chicago Tribune, ONTHEBUS, and West/Word. He is author of a book of poetry entitled Gatita, and co-author of a second volume entitled The View Outside.

**David Ilson** lives and writes in Ceharhurst, New York.

**Troy Tradup** currently resides in Minneapolis, MN. His play "The Desired Effect," opened in the Unicorn Theatre in Minneapolis in November 1991. He is currently working on his first novel.

**T. G. Sheppard** is a graduate student at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, studying Political Philosophy, and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the same university in Political Science.

**James Theobald** is a graduate student of Saint Peter's College in Jersey City and has been employed as a counselor of emotionally disturbed children. "Round" is one of the 12 thematically related stories he has been working on for several years.

**Bonnie Hanks** lives in the country with her husband, a general surgeon at the University of Virginia, two young daughters, and four horses.

**David W. Decherd** is currently serving in the U.S. Marine Corps as an aircraft maintenance instructor. He has been writing for many years, but has only begun submitting his work in the last year and a half. "I Hate People" is his first publication.

**Jerry Goodwin** has lived in the Fresno area since 1965. He has been writing fiction for 19 years and his literary influences include: Hemingway, Steinbeck, Jack London, and Ray Bradbury. He recently had another short story published in The Pinehurst Journal.

**Trish Rucker** is a freelance writer from Atlanta. Some of her publications include stories and poems in: Carolina Quarterly, Poet Lore, and Southern Poetry Review. The Georgia Council for the Arts awarded Ms. Rucker a 1990 grant to complete her first novel, tentatively titled The Meaning of Dreams.



**Christmas**                      The Guilt of Survivors  
 Aftershocks                      **Going Home**                      **20th Century**  
**On Being a Survivor**                      **Porchas**                      Anger  
 Insanity      Forget About Love: A Duet for Woman and Man  
                  **An AIDS Victim**                      **My [erebral] Love**  
**The Falcon**                      **ILLUSTRATION**  
                  The Insomniac                      Ten  
 The Flower Cart      In the Mouth of Dis                      Mica  
                  Lost and Found #2                      **Before the Storm**  
**Struck by the Sublime in the Night**                      Blee  
                  Hate People                      Round  
                  Good Habits Make Life Easier  
**Death Valley**                      The Dreadful Spirring as Dark Falls  
                  Bread                      Moses's Nightmare  
 Mannequin      The Gift                      **Birth-Death Moments**  
                  A Tan Ride                      **Vernal Equinox**                      Fall  
 Wine Country - Napa, California      I Tell  
                  Looming Visions                      Rendezvous  
**Signals from Ruins**                      Tresspass